

FIELD  
TESTED



# HOOPHOUSE FOR BEDDING PLANTS

*Field Tested is a series of reports about farm tools that have been tested by Montana farmers to enhance their specialty crop production. The reports describe these farmers' findings to help others make informed decisions about their specialty crop businesses. Visit [FarmLinkMontana.org](http://FarmLinkMontana.org) to read more Field Tested reports. This project is administered by the Community Food & Agriculture Coalition with funding from the Montana Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program.*

## MILL CRICK FARM | HAMILTON



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### MILL CRICK SNAPSHOT

**Location:** Hamilton, MT  
**Acres in Production:** 2 acres  
**Operator(s):** Randi Mark  
**Crops:** Mixed vegetables,  
pasture, cut flowers



## INTRODUCTION

Randi Mark operates Mill Crick Farm north of Hamilton. He purchased the farm in 2012 and grows mixed produce and cut flowers on 2 acres —7,500 square feet of which are high tunnel production. Randi needed additional space to store bedding plants and cure and store storage crops in order to increase on-farm sales; he decided a conveniently-placed hoop house would be the best solution. Randi's unique hoop house is not used for production and he wants to help other farms be creative about using hoop houses to support their business.



Mill Crick Farm on a stormy day.

## A HOOP HOUSE TO COMPLEMENT A FARMSTAND

Randi uses an unmanned farm stand to sell direct to consumers at retail prices outside the farmers market. He extended the beginning of his season by selling nursery plants at the farm stand starting in April. Prior to the construction of this hoop house he had to haul his plants between the production area and the stand every morning and evening. This labor-intensive process greatly limited the number of plants he could sell at the stand. Randi knew he could expand his beginning-season sales if he increased his storage space and eliminated the need to haul plants across the farm. He located the structure in close proximity to the farm stand to eliminate those labor costs.



Dual use hoop house:  
Curing onions (left) and Bedding plants (right).

### MATERIALS PURCHASED

- 20' x 24' cold frame
- 6mm plastic cover
- Endwall and hip lumber
- Lumber and fastener for plant benches
- Inflation fan kit
- Wire and wirelock base
- Roll up sides
- Automatic shutter vents
- 2 circulation fans
- TOTAL: ~\$2500

## HOOP HOUSE DESIGN

Randi purchased materials from Nolt's Midwest Produce Supply because he has worked with the company before and finds their customer service to be reliable. He got the lumber from Don's Hardware. The hoop house provides 480 square feet of protected space for Randi's operation. Since the hoop house is not being used for production, Randi added gravel to its floor to help with tidiness and insulation. If he could afford it, though, he'd want a concrete floor so he could use a pallet jack or dolly to move storage crops.

### TIP

Randi wishes he had made the door of the hoop house big enough to allow a pallet through to make transporting crops easier.



The completed hoop house at Mill Crick Farm full of bedding plants and early vegetables.



## NURSERY PLANTS IN THE SPRING

Previously, selling during freezing months required Randi to move nursery plants across the farm morning and night to protect them from frost. Sometimes the plants would still suffer from having been exposed to cold or couldn't be displayed at the stand due to wind gusts that would knock the plants over. This labor limited the volume he was willing and able to stock.

Now, Randi has increased the volume and diversity of nursery plants he sells. Prior to this hoop house space, Randi would start about 20 trays of plants because that was all he could effectively manage to haul to his farm stand.

With the new space, he now starts 150 trays of plants. Since nursery plants provide early season income this is especially important for Randi when the diversity of vegetables he has to offer is small.



Bedding plants ready for sale 6 weeks earlier than last year.

## STORAGE CROPS IN FALL

Randi could also use the hoop house to cure overflow onions and garlic in the fall. The extra protected space to use at the end of the season can be extremely helpful and is a nice complimentary use of the space once nursery plants are no longer being sold.



One of Randi's employees laying out onions for curing

## Results

The additional protected storage space in the hoop house enabled Randi to increase his early-season production of nursery plants by more than seven times his original production. He was also able to make more use of the space in fall by putting overflow garlic and onions in there to cure. This particular project really enabled Randi to do lots more of what he was already doing by increasing his labor and space efficiency.

## A MULTI-FUNCTIONAL HOOP HOUSE: EARLY SEASON SALES + EXTRA SPACE IN FALL



### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**Montana Department of Agriculture Specialty Crop Block Grant Program:** The purpose of this program is solely to enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Montana. Visit their website to find funding opportunities and more information. Search [Montana SCBG](#).

**Farm Link Montana:** A project of the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition to connect Montana's beginning farmers and ranchers with the tools they need to succeed: [farmlinkmontana.org](http://farmlinkmontana.org)

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