Demand for organic heirloom and specialty tomatoes grown in high tunnels is rising, making them high-value crops. Unfortunately, growers of such tomatoes in Florida face challenges in managing soil-borne diseases. Due to Fusarium wilt, one farm faced the complete crop failure of a tomato popular in the local market. University of Florida researcher Xin Zhao partnered with the farm, Frog Song Organics, to see if grafting with resistant rootstocks would control soil-borne diseases in organic high tunnel production systems.

Their experiment compared grafted and non-grafted specialty tomatoes for soil-borne disease resistance, yield and fruit quality. They found that grafting was an effective tool for managing Fusarium wilt and improving the overall health of tomato plants. Yields significantly improved in grafted tomato production compared with non-grafted controls. Even with higher production costs associated with the grafting, the grafted plants resulted in increased net profits.

One hundred professionals and 450 farmers learned of the rewarding research findings at workshops and presentations. Zhao views this on-farm research project as a successful demonstration of technology transfer through a collaborative and productive partnership with local growers to address production issues.

For more information on this project, see www.sare.org/projects, and search for project number OS13-083.
SARE Grants in Florida

SARE has awarded a total of 140 grants in Florida since 1988.

- 30 Research & Education Grants
- 25 Farmer/Rancher Grants
- 7 Community Innovation Grants
- 9 Professional Development Grants
- 47 Graduate Student Grants
- 22 On-Farm Research Grants

For detailed information on SARE projects, go to www.sare.org.

Marilyn Swisher
University of Florida
(352) 273-3538
mesw@ufl.edu

Cassel Gardner
Florida A&M University
(850) 599-3594
cassel.gardner@famu.edu

SARE’s Impact

- 53 percent of producers report using a new production technique after reading a SARE publication.
- 79 percent of producers said they improved soil quality through their SARE project.
- 64 percent of producers said their SARE project helped them achieve higher sales.

Contact Your SARE State Coordinator

SARE sustainable ag coordinators run state-level educational programs for Extension and other ag professionals, and many help grant applicants and recipients with planning and outreach. Visit www.southernsare.org/florida to learn more.

SARE is funded by the USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA).

For detailed information on SARE projects, go to www.SARE.org