When Clemson University fruit specialist Juan Carlos Melgar suggested putting a paper bag over a peach to detract insects and diseases during production, farmers laughed. But when his SARE-funded trials showed that the technique protects the fruit from devastating brown rot, marauding insects like plum curculio and even hungry birds, producers and backyard growers started paying attention.

Researchers found that bagging peaches between petal fall and harvest reduces pesticide use while increasing yields and maintaining flavor. Even though it involves more labor, Melgar estimated that bagging can increase revenue by $95 per tree in an organic system when the fruit is sold directly to consumers. “We’ve gotten a lot of positive responses from farmers all over the country as a result of the research study,” said Melgar.

Fruit bagging for protection is a common strategy in Asia. With South Carolina ranked second in the nation behind California in peach production at 77,000 tons, researchers at Clemson felt that applying the technique to orchards was a worthwhile endeavor because peach growers in the southeastern U.S. face very high pest and disease pressures. Melgar is taking this research to a regional level with a newly acquired $1 million USDA-NIFA grant, applying the technique to more orchards in South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

For more information on this project, see [www.sare.org/projects](http://www.sare.org/projects), and search for project number OS16-094.
SARE Grants in South Carolina

SARE has awarded a total of 61 grants in South Carolina since 1988.

- 17 Farmer/Rancher Grants
- 13 Research & Education Grants
- 9 On-Farm Research Grants
- 6 Graduate Student Grants
- 6 Community Innovation Grants
- 10 Professional Development Grants
- 6 Graduate Student Grants

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

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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/southcarolina to learn more.

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.

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

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