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Newest farmworker housing ... igloos? **Alaska company demonstrates igloo-like structures that could be useful to growers**

By [Dan Wheat](#)
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WENATCHEE — It's white, shaped like an igloo, built by a company in Juneau, Alaska, and it might become farmworker housing.

The InterShelter drew attention at last week's Washington State Horticultural Association annual conference, sitting in the parking lot behind the Wenatchee Convention Center. Growers heading in and out of the conference dropped into the little dome to find out what it was.

They found enthusiastic salesmen eager to talk to them about the InterShelter, a light-weight but reportedly strong structure built of high-density fiberglass to sustain hurricanes and stay relatively cool in warm weather, and warm in cold weather.

The salesmen pitched the dome as the perfect missing link for seasonal worker housing, fitting the gap between tents and manufactured housing.

Jon Wyss, government affairs director of Gebbers Farms in Brewster, said he learned of the InterShelter through the Association of Washington Business and invited InterShelter President Don Kubley to bring one to the hort show so growers could see it.

"Right now we're just in the exploratory phase. We have to see if it meets agency standards for farmworker housing," Wyss said. "It may be an option for the small grower. It's pretty darn cheap."

The domes, 20 feet in diameter and 12 feet high at the peak, sell for \$12,000, plus \$2,000 for insulation, said salesman Cary Lynch.

They are fireproof, portable, maintenance free and can withstand small-arms fire, he said.

They have held their inside temperature at 80 degrees without insulation or air-conditioning while in 130-degree temperatures in Saudi Arabian desert, Lynch said.

They are large enough to house six people by state standards, he said.

Kubley said his 2-year-old company has built about 500 units and sold them for various uses in the United States and Saudi Arabia. He said the U.S. Defense Department, FEMA and the American Red Cross are interested in them.

Kirk Mayer, manager of Washington Growers Clearing House Association in Wenatchee, said it's exciting to see new types of innovative housing. He arranged for the unit at the convention to be taken to the state migrant labor camp at Monitor for growers and government inspectors to take a longer look at it. He said he hopes it can stay through next year's cherry harvest so it can be tested with people living in it.

Wyss said the portable nature of the domes could be handy for Gebbers Farms to reduce daily busing of workers between Brewster and Chelan during cherry harvest.

Jim Colbert, special projects manager of Stemilt AgServices in Wenatchee, said he believes the domes will meet state regulations and that Stemilt AgServices will consider buying them if they do.

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