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Application of greenhouses for sustainable food production

Abdeen Mustafa Omer

Energy Research Institute (ERI), United Kingdom

A greenhouse is essentially an enclosed structure, which traps the short wavelength solar radiation and stores the long wavelength thermal radiation to create a favourable microclimate for higher productivity. The sun's radiation incident on the greenhouse has two parts: direct radiation and an associated diffuse sky radiation. The diffuse part is not focused by the lenses and goes right through Fresnel lenses onto the surface of the absorbers. This energy is absorbed and transformed into heat, which is then transported via the liquid medium in copper pipes to the water (heat) storage tanks or, if used, open fish tanks. In this way, an optimal temperature for both plant cultivation and fish production can be maintained. Stable plant growth conditions are light, temperature and air humidity. Light for the photosynthesis of plants comes from the diffuse radiation, which is without substantial fluctuations and variation throughout most of the day. The air temperature inside the greenhouse is one of the factors that have an influence on the precocity of production. The selective collector acts in a more perceptible way on extreme air temperatures inside the greenhouse. Hence, the system makes it possible to avoid the excessive deviation of the temperature inside the greenhouse and provides a favourable microclimate for the precocity of the culture. Sediment and some associated water from the sediment traps are used as organic fertilizer for the plant cultivation. The present trend in greenhouse cultivation is to extend the crop production season in order to maximize use of the equipment and increase annual productivity and profitability. However, in many Mediterranean greenhouses, such practices are limited because the improper cooling methods (mainly natural or forced ventilation) used do not provide the desired micro-climatic condition during the summer of a composite climate. Also, some of these greenhouses have been built where the meteorological conditions require some heating during the winter, particularly at night. The worst scenario is during the winter months when relatively large difference in temperature between day and night occurs. However, overheating of the greenhouse during the day is common, even in winter, requiring ventilation of the structure. Hence, several techniques have been proposed for the storage of the solar energy received by the greenhouse during the day and its use to heat the structure at night. Air or water can be used for heat transport. The circulating water is heated during the day via two processes. The water absorbs part of the infrared radiation of the solar spectrum. Since the water is transparent in the visible region, they do not compete with the plants that need it. Alternatively, the water exchanges heat with the greenhouse air through the walls. At night, if the greenhouse temperature goes down below a specified value, the water begins to circulate acting as heat transfer surfaces heating the air in the greenhouse. It also enabled the minimisation of temperature variation and, hence avoided the hazard of any sudden climatic change inside the greenhouse.

abdeenomer2@yahoo.co.uk