



Rhode Island State Office

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

High Tunnel Initiative

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Funding Available to Help Farmers Extend the Growing Season, Diversify Production, Conserve Water, and Reduce Inputs While Protecting Natural Resources Through NRCS Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is providing financial assistance for seasonal high tunnels as part of a new national Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative. The initiative will assist NRCS test conservation benefits and effects in practical, real-world situation to determine their effectiveness in conserving water, reducing pesticide use, maintaining vital soil nutrients, and increasing crop yields.

The initiative is a USDA effort to connect farmers and consumers, strengthen local and regional food production, increase the use of sustainable agricultural practices, and promote consumption of fresh, local food.



What is a high tunnel?

Seasonal high tunnels are structures made of plastic or metal pipe and covered with plastic or other sheeting. Easy to build, maintain and move, they provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season. Unlike greenhouses, they require no energy, relying on natural sunlight to modify the climate inside to create favorable conditions for growing vegetables and other specialty crops. This initiative will test the potential conservation benefits of growing crops under these structures.

View informational videos on the USDA-NRCS high tunnels/hoop houses:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=c288LyqQf_w and www.youtube.com/watch?v=14JE1T2Vd_Q&NR=1

What will EQIP pay for?

Funding is provided through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). In most cases, NRCS provides financial assistance for high tunnels up to a maximum of five percent of one acre, or a total of 2,178 square feet. Landowners can purchase and install larger high tunnels, but NRCS will only pay for the first 2,178 square feet.

Plants must be planted in the ground or in permanent raised beds, not containerized.

Since water runoff from high tunnels can cause erosion, pooling, and other environmental concerns, additional conservation practices may be installed as a condition for the installation of a high tunnel. These include:

- runoff management
- filter strips
- drain structure for water control
- critical area planting

The images below depict the construction of a hoop house in Rhode Island funded under NRCS.



Who can apply?

To qualify for the Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative, you must:

- Be an agricultural producer.
- Install the high tunnel on existing cultivated land.

Other considerations

- The land must currently be in agriculture.
- Approved applicants will receive financial assistance for a high tunnel and related additional conservation practices that help achieve the expected conservation benefits or mitigate any potential negative effects from installing the high tunnel.
- The high tunnel must be purchased as a manufactured kit from an NRCS list of approved vendors, be at least six feet high, and have an expected life span of at least four years.
- Electrical, heating, or ventilation systems may be added to the high tunnel at the applicant's expense.
- Participating growers must help evaluate the effects of the high tunnels on natural resources. You must complete a short questionnaire annually about nutrients and pesticides used, crop yields, and crop season dates.

How do I apply?

Farmers should contact the Rhode Island Service Center for more information and to determine eligibility. Simply call our office at 401-822-8848, E-mail NRCSInfo@ri.usda.gov, or visit our Web site for application information.

http://www.ri.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip/High_Tunnel_Initiative.html

Completed applications are accepted year round but there are three ranking deadline periods:

February 3, 2012; March 30, 2012; June 1, 2012