

Natural Resources Conservation Service

# Seasonal High Tunnels

## For Food and Other Specialty Crop Production



### ***What is the Seasonal High Tunnels Initiative?***

Seasonal High Tunnels is an Initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels to increase the availability of locally-grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.

### ***Why Seasonal High Tunnels?***

A seasonal high tunnel is a polyethylene-covered structure at least 6 feet in height, which modifies the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetables and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath.

### ***What are the Potential Resource Benefits of High Tunnels?***

Potential natural resource benefits include improved plant quality; improved soil quality; and improved water quality through methods such as reduced nutrient and pesticide transport; improved air quality through reduced transportation inputs; and reducing energy use through local consumption.

### ***What are the Features of High Tunnels?***

Commercially available high tunnel structures are made in numerous widths and lengths. The high tunnels are constructed of metal or plastic bow frames that are covered with a minimum of 6 mil polyethylene. Ventilation is achieved by means of a combination of roll-up side vents, end vents, and (occasionally) roof vents. Generally, the end walls are framed-in to create door and ventilation areas. The high tunnel structure covers several crop rows; is wide enough to allow crop growth to full maturity under the tunnel; and is tall enough to allow spraying, cultivation, and harvest to occur with the tunnel intact.

### ***What Kind of Supporting Practices are Available?***

Agronomic practices, such as Conservation Cover, Crop Rotation, Cover Crop and Residue Management are available to assist with plant health and soil conditions in the field. Surface water can be managed using Grassed Waterways or Diversions. A Soil Conservationist will assist with planning supporting practices to address resource concerns in the field.

### ***What Kind of Financial Assistance is Available?***

Seasonal high tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Financial assistance will be limited to 3 new seasonal high tunnels, each covering up to 2,880 square feet), per farming operation – equivalent to a structure size of approximately 30 ft. x 96 ft. The seasonal high tunnel has an expected practice life of four years.

**What is the Additional Eligibility Criteria and Limitation for Participating?**

- Applicant must be an eligible producer.
- High tunnels are eligible to be constructed on cropland. Sites must be approved by NRCS.
- High tunnels are to be constructed to manufacturer’s design and specifications. All designs must be reviewed by NRCS.
- The Minimum Spacing between high tunnels shall be one building width
- All crop production must be done in the soil profile, including perennial crops such as raspberries, blueberries, etc. No potted or containerized production will be allowed in the structure.
- No alternative uses for the structure are allowed during non-growing season months – **NO** storage, potted or containerized plant production, or housing of livestock or poultry.
- Participants will be responsible for operation and maintenance of these structures, including clearing snow from on and around the high tunnel. If snow and/or wind are a problem, covers are to be removed. The local building inspector must be contacted to see if such structures can be built; any required permits are the participant’s responsibility.
- Covers can be mobile to follow the high value crop in a rotation but can only be moved onto existing contract acreage, and shall have soil loss within the soil tolerance level.

**How Much Will it Cost?**

You will receive payment from NRCS when a planner certifies that the Seasonal High Tunnel has been installed to the manufacturer’s design and specification. Estimate payment rate is a portion of the total amount you pay for structure and installation. Payments have been calculated to be approximately 75% of the typical cost for a general applicant and 90% of the typical cost for historically underserved applicants\*. You will be responsible for the balance of the cost of the structure and installation.

2014 Seasonal High Tunnel Payment Rates:

Practice	Type	Unit	Payment Rate
Seasonal High Tunnel	Contiguous US – Snow (Gothic Style)	Sq Ft	\$3.74
Seasonal High Tunnel	HU*-Contiguous US – Snow (Gothic Style)	Sq Ft	\$4.49

**Who Do I Contact?**

Danielson Field Office – Raymond Covino, District Conservationist – (860) 779-0557, Ext. 102  
 Hamden Field Office – Diane Blais, District Conservationist – (203) 287-8038, Ext. 101  
 Norwich Field Office – Javier Cruz, District Conservationist – (860) 887-3604, Ext. 307  
 Torrington Field Office – Kathleen Johnson, District Conservationist – (860) 626-8258, Ext. 200  
 Windsor Field Office – Vivian Felten, District Conservationist – (860) 688-7725, Ext. 118  
 Tolland State Office – Joyce Purcell, Assistant State Conservationist-Programs – (860) 871-4028

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\*For Information about historically underserved groups, consult your local NRCS service center, or visit: [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SLB\\_Farmer/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/SLB_Farmer/)