

5. Irrigation must be available for use under the high tunnel structure.
6. Participant must construct a “kit” type structure and other required components. (Only metal framed structures are eligible for financial assistance.) Installation must be done according to the manufacturer’s recommendations.
7. Participant agrees to attend and complete required educational training on seasonal high tunnel management (prescreening requirement). Alabama Cooperative Extension System provides workshops.
8. Participant must provide a copy of the manufacturer’s design specifications of the house to the local NRCS District Conservationist to place in the office case file.
9. Operation and management will include control of internal temperatures and soil moisture, removal of plastic covers in the event of extreme weather which may compromise structure, and the required maintenance including replacement of covers and environmentally safe disposal of removed covers.
10. Reimbursement will be made only after the structure is completely constructed and inspected by NRCS personnel.
11. Participant agrees to maintain the structure for a period of at least four years and maintain a record system on at least an annual basis.

## Associated Conservation Practices

Since water runoff from high tunnels can cause erosion, pooling, and other environmental concerns, there are additional conservation practices that can be planned to support the high tunnel practice as determined by the planner. These practices must be part of the Conservation Plan, but not required in the contract. Practices include:

- 328 - Crop rotation
- 342 - Critical area stabilization
- 412 - Grass waterway (depending on site)
- 441 - Irrigation water management (micro)
- 590 - Nutrient management
- 595 - Pest management

For additional information, contact:

USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)  
 P.O. Box 311  
 Auburn, Alabama 36831-0311  
 3381 Skyway Drive  
 Auburn, Alabama 36830-6443  
 Phone: 334-887-4500  
 Fax: 334-887-4551

You may also visit Alabama NRCS online:  
<http://www.al.nrcs.usda.gov/>

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United States Department of Agriculture

# Assistance For Constructing Seasonal High Tunnels (Hoop Houses) in Alabama



Helping People Help The Land

## Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices to address soil, water, air, plant, animal, and energy resources. Signup is continuous.

A new financial assistance pilot program for a statewide concern is available through EQIP for landowners to install seasonal high tunnels (hoop houses). These structures help extend the growing season, and improve plant and soil quality. They also help improve water quality by reducing nutrient and pesticide transport. For this pilot project, plants must be planted in the ground or in permanent raised beds, and not containerized.

### What are Seasonal High Tunnels?

A seasonal high tunnel is a polyethylene covered structure with no electrical, ventilation, or heating system which modifies the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetables and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil within the covered space.



*Seasonal high tunnels (hoop houses) help extend the growing season, and improve plant quality and soil quality.*

### Where Are These Houses Used?

A seasonal high tunnel may be used where existing specialty commodity crops are grown in open field conditions, and extension of the growing season is needed due to climate conditions.

Producers must use commercially available high tunnel structure kits that are made in numerous widths and lengths and are constructed of metal frames that are covered with a single layer of 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.

### Conservation Management System

Water runoff from high tunnels or from other nearby sources can cause erosion and ponding issues that may require the application of other practices such as infiltration trenches, diversions, underground outlets, and critical area plantings. These additional practices must be planned and installed as a condition for the installation of a high tunnel. Additional practices should be considered as a part of a conservation plan, such as nutrient and pest management and crop rotation.

### Who is Eligible

1. Participants must be on record with the Farm Service Agency and meet all eligibility requirements including producer and land eligibilities.



*Alabama NRCS is one of 38 states serving as a pilot state for seasonal high tunnels (hoop houses).*

2. The applicant should have land where crops are actively being cultivated. If land is in perennial sod at time of eligibility, then the site can be approved as long as the area has been cropped two of the last five years.
3. Eligible crops include vegetables, fruits, flowers, and/or bulbs.

### Preparation and Planning

1. The maximum size for USDA-NRCS financial assistance is 2,178 sq. ft.
2. The tunnel frame must be at least 6 feet in height with a minimum 6-mil UV resistant polyethylene cover.
3. When at all possible, the structure should be installed in a North-South direction.
4. Additional practices such as roof runoff management and critical area treatment must be installed to address current erosion issues.