

Nebraska Fact Sheet: Seasonal High Tunnel System for Crops

January 2013

Overview

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program that offers financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers through contracts up to a maximum term of ten years in length. These contracts provide assistance to plan and implement conservation practices that improve soil, water, plant, animal, air, energy conservation, and related resources on agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. In addition, EQIP can help producers meet federal, state, Tribal and local environmental regulations.

Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative

The Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to agricultural producers. The goal of the initiative is to assist producers with extending the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. The initiative can assist producers with improving plant and soil quality, reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation, improving air quality through reduced transportation inputs, and reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce.

Eligibility

Eligible applicants include individuals, legal entities, Indian Tribes or joint operations engaged in agricultural production. Producers who grow agricultural commodities on eligible land and have resource concerns which may be addressed by a seasonal high tunnel may participate in the new Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative.

Eligible producers interested in entering into a financial assistance agreement with NRCS for EQIP assistance may file an application at their local USDA

Service Center at any time. Applicants must:

- Be an agricultural producer and have control of eligible land for the term of the proposed contract period.
- Be in control of eligible land with a cropping history such as cropland.
- Be in compliance with the provisions for protecting the interests of tenants and sharecroppers, including the provisions for sharing EQIP payments on a fair and equitable basis.
- Be in compliance with the highly erodible land and wetland conservation compliance provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Be within appropriate payment limitation requirements, as specified in the 2008 Farm Bill.
- Be in compliance with adjusted gross income requirements of the 2008 Farm Bill.

How EQIP Works

NRCS staff will work with the applicant to develop a conservation plan and an EQIP plan of operations. This plan becomes the basis of the EQIP contract between NRCS and the participant.



A seasonal high tunnel is a polyethylene covered structure used to create favorable growing conditions.

Applications submitted for the Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative are accepted on a continuous basis throughout the year. Applications are evaluated and ranked according to environmental benefits expected through implementation of approved conservation practices.

For fiscal year 2013, NRCS has established application deadlines where eligible applications will be ranked and considered for funding as follows:

- Application Period 1
Submission Deadline: Dec. 21, 2012
- Application Period 2
Submission Deadline: Feb. 15, 2013

Applications can be submitted at anytime, but all applications received after these deadlines will be evaluated and considered for later funding opportunities.

Applying for Funds Through EQIP

EQIP is a voluntary conservation program administered and carried out through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. It supports agriculture production and environmental quality as compatible goals.

Through EQIP, land users may receive financial and technical help to voluntarily address soil, water and related natural resource concerns on private lands with structural and management conservation practices.

Applications for participation in EQIP can be made at a local NRCS field office. All EQIP applications are evaluated through an environmental scoring and ranking process. In Nebraska, the demand for EQIP

funding generally far exceeds the available funding, and only those applications which rank the highest are extended an offer to develop a funded contract.

In general, EQIP is intended to assist agricultural producers with the implementation of conservation practices that help solve an identified resource concern that currently exists on their farm. EQIP rules specify that payments are limited to the implementation of newly applied conservation practices that have not been previously established. EQIP is *not* a grant program. EQIP payments are made through a reimbursement process. Participants must successfully carry out the approved conservation actions, then certify the practice for payment.

Payment Limitations

Program payments are limited to \$300,000 a person or entity for all contracts entered into during any six-year period. This limitation includes unpaid prior year contract obligations as of October 1, 2008, as well as new contract obligations. For the purpose of applying this requirement, the six-year period will include those payments made in fiscal years 2009-2014. Payments received for technical assistance are excluded from this limitation.

More Information

For more information about EQIP and this new Seasonal Tunnel System practice, visit your local NRCS field office located in the USDA Service Center, or the Nebraska NRCS web site at www.ne.usda.gov, under the Programs tab.



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