

# High Tunnels

## About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Delaware works to protect and conserve natural resources on private lands.

As part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the 2008 Farm Bill.

The conservation provisions in the 2008 Farm Bill simplify existing programs and have created new programs to address high priority environmental protection goals.

In addition to addressing a broad range of environmental goals, the 2008 Farm Bill includes increased financial assistance for beginning, limited resource and socially disadvantaged farmers.



Contact your local NRCS field office for more information.

## Contact NRCS:

Delaware  
USDA Service Centers

Kent County: 302-741-2600

New Castle County: 302-832-3100

Sussex County: 302-856-3990

(Select extension 3 for NRCS)

## Purpose

Seasonal High Tunnels is a pilot project under the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels to increase the availability of locally-grown produce in a conservation-friendly way. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers financial assistance to help cover the costs of high tunnel systems through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program.

## 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 vegetable and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it. A 3-year pilot will test whether there are additional conservation benefits associated with the use of these structures.

## Potential Resource Benefits of High Tunnels

Potential natural resource benefits from using tunnel structures include: (1) improved plant quality, (2) improved soil quality, and (3) improved water quality through methods such as reduced nutrient and pesticide transport.

## 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.





# High Tunnels

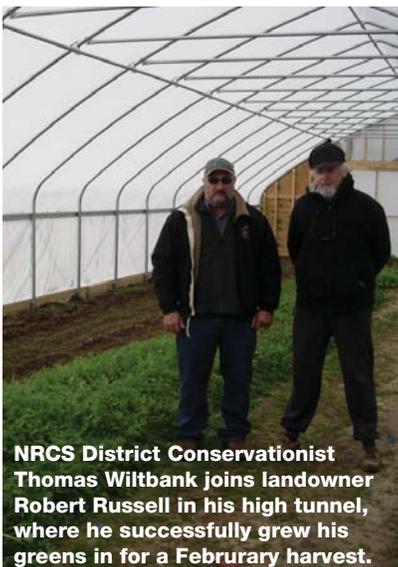
## Financial Assistance

During the pilot period, high tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through the EQIP and AMA. Financial assistance will be limited to tunnels covering up to 5 percent of one acre (2,178 square feet) per farming operation – equivalent to a structure size of approximately 30 ft x 72 ft.

## More Information

Contact your local USDA Service Center to speak to one of our conservation professionals to begin the program application process.

Information and application forms are available on our website.



**NRCS District Conservationist Thomas Wiltbank joins landowner Robert Russell in his high tunnel, where he successfully grew his greens in for a February harvest.**

## Eligibility Criteria for High Tunnel Program Participants:

- Applicant must be an eligible producer who is currently be engaged in agricultural production.
- High tunnels are eligible to be constructed on existing cultivated cropland. Sites must be approved by NRCS.
- High tunnels are to be constructed using commercially manufactured packages or kits. NRCS will verify authenticity through bills and will monitor construction progress.
- Alterations such as adding electricity, heat, or active ventilation are allowed under this program; however, NRCS doesn't provide financial assistance for installation or maintenance.
- All crop production must be done in the soil profile. No potted or containerized production will be allowed in these structures, though raised beds may be used.
- No alternative uses for the high tunnel structure are allowed during non-growing season months-- no storage, no potted or containerized plant production, no 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.

## Participant Responsibilities During the Pilot

NRCS is interested in evaluating the effectiveness of seasonal high tunnels throughout this pilot period. Participants will be asked to assist NRCS with this effort by providing the following information when requested:

- First year only – cost of the seasonal high tunnel system.
- Annual maintenance costs and requirements for the seasonal high tunnel system.
- How long did the structure extend the growing season?
- Did the seasonal high tunnel increase production? If so, how much?
- What rates of nutrients (N, P and K) were applied before and after the seasonal high tunnel structure was installed?
- What rates of pesticides (product and rate) were applied before and after the seasonal high tunnel structure was installed?
- Other observations and evaluations. Recommendations to improve their effectiveness.