



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Delaware

Conservation Fact Sheet

High Tunnels

About NRCS

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

Financial Assistance

High tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through NRCS' Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Financial assistance is offered based on the payment rate in the requested fiscal year.

Contact your local NRCS office:

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

A High Tunnel System, commonly called a "hoop house," is an increasingly popular conservation practice for farmers, and is available with financial assistance through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program. With high tunnel systems, no summer is too short or winter too cold because high tunnels:

- Extend the growing season
- Improve plant quality and soil quality
- Reduce nutrient and pesticide transportation
- Improve air quality through reduced transportation inputs
- Reduce energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce

Potential Resource Benefits of High Tunnels

High tunnels protect plants from severe weather and allow farmers to extend their growing seasons – growing earlier into the spring, later into the fall, and sometimes, year-round. And because high tunnels prevent direct rainfall from reaching plants, farmers can use precise tools like drip irrigation to efficiently deliver water and nutrients to plants. High tunnels also offer farmers a greater ability to control pests and can even protect plants from pollen and pesticide drift.

A number of soil health practices can be used in high tunnels, including cover crops and crop rotations, which also prevent erosion, suppress weeds, increase soil water content, and break pest cycles.

Perhaps the best thing about high tunnels is that they help farmers provide their communities with healthy local food for much of the year – food that requires less energy and transportation inputs.



An example of a typical high tunnel structure in Delaware.



High Tunnels

Financial Assistance

High tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through the EQIP and AMA. Financial assistance is offered based on the state's payment rate in the requested fiscal year. Historically Underserved farmers are eligible for higher payment rates. A maximum payment amount per individual or entity will be applied based on the fiscal year.

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 online at www.de.nrcs.usda.gov.



An example of a typical high tunnel structure in Delaware.

Eligibility Criteria for High Tunnel Program Participants:

- Applicant must be an eligible producer who is currently 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.