

April 2020

Factsheet

EQIP HIGH TUNNEL INITIATIVE

The USDA-NRCS now offers financial and technical assistance to producers to install a **High Tunnel**.



A **High Tunnel** is a polyethylene-covered metal structure, sometimes called a “Hoop House,” that covers high-value crops to extend the growing season in an environmentally-safe manner. In Pennsylvania, high tunnels can be used to extend the growing season for fresh market vegetables and other crops, increasing yields and profitability. They can also improve plant health and vigor. High tunnels may look like greenhouses, but they are managed differently. In high tunnels, plants are grown directly in the ground. High tunnels control where to put water and fertilizer so farmers can grow a greater variety of vegetables in a semi-controlled environment. They can also conserve water and save energy costs. Under EQIP, NRCS will only fund a high tunnel on land with a cropping history.

A greenhouse is a more sophisticated structure. Greenhouse plants are usually grown in pots or other containers set on racks or tables. The plants in a high tunnel grow in the soil (usually amended with compost, cover crops, mulch or other materials) under the high tunnel. Also, high tunnels don’t use heaters, lights or mechanical ventilation systems – opening and closing the high tunnel regulates the sun’s heat and ventilation.

Farmers can use High Tunnels to manage or extend the growing season, providing them with more flexibility to meet local market needs. Increased local food production and consumption helps communities increase sustainability while lowering energy and transportation inputs and costs.

A High Tunnel can also help producers transition to specialty crops or organic. An extended growing season and steady income can offer advantages to small, limited-resource, and organic farmers. High Tunnels can help producers address resource concerns by:

- Improving plant quality.
- Improving soil quality.
- Reducing nutrient and pesticide transport.



- Improving air quality by reducing transportation of inputs.
- Reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce.
- Adapting to climate change.

- What size of high tunnel do you want?
- Exactly where on the property will you build the high tunnel?
- Is there enough available sunlight?
- Does the soil have the nutrients plants need to grow?
- Is the land flat or sloping?
- What is in and under the soil?
- Does water soak into the soil quickly after a rain or does it pond?
- How will you water the plants?
- Is there electricity nearby if you need it?
- What crops you want to plant?
- Are your crops self-pollinating or will you need pollinators?
- How do your neighbors feel about having a high tunnel nearby?
- Does the city or municipality have building or zoning regulations that might affect putting up a high tunnel?



Good air flow through the high tunnel is important. Level ground protected from wind without much shade is best. Your local NRCS team can help you choose the right position on your land.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conservation Crop Rotation • Cover Crop • Critical Area Planting • Diversion • Grassed Waterway • Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrigation Reservoir • Irrigation System, Micro-irrigation • Irrigation Water Management Plan • Nutrient Management Plan • Residue and Tillage Management • Underground Outlet |
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Contact your local NRCS Field Office for technical and financial assistance (www.nrcs.usda.gov), or your local University Extension agent for plant recommendations.



For More Information:

USDA-NRCS
359 East Park Drive Suite 2
Harrisburg, PA 17111-2727
Voice 717-237-2100
Web: www.nrcs.usda.gov