



# High Tunnel Systems in Wisconsin



## EXTEND YOUR GROWING SEASON

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) available through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) provides financial assistance for the construction of High Tunnel Systems to support a successful and sustainable conservation operation.

A high tunnel, also known as a hoop house, is an enclosed polyethylene, polycarbonate, plastic, or fabric-covered structure used to protect crops from sun, wind, excessive rainfall or cold to extend the growing season in an environmentally safe manner. The high tunnel structure must be planned, designed, and constructed from a manufactured kit in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations. Unlike greenhouses where the plants inside them are grown in pots or trays, high tunnel crops must be grown directly in the ground in the natural soil profile.

### REQUIREMENTS

- Planting directly into the soil or in raised beds of on-site soil.
- No planting in pots, on racks, or benches.
- There is no maximum size limit. High Tunnel Systems can be scaled for smaller structures less than 600 square feet, but there is a minimum height requirement of 6-feet at the peak of the structure.
- The maximum ground slope allowed is five percent.
- UV resistant cover - at a minimum, a six mil greenhouse grade polyethylene.
- Cannot be used to house livestock or store equipment.
- The high tunnel must be built according to manufacturer instructions. The NRCS does not endorse any product, company, or brand of high tunnel.

### BENEFITS

High tunnels provide an intermediate level of environmental protection and control compared to open field conditions and heated greenhouses. They create a micro-climate inside the high tunnel that raises the temperature and protects crops from potentially damaging weather. Overall, high tunnels provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season, reduce or avoid use of pesticides, and reduce runoff and leaching of nitrogen into the soil.

### ELIGIBILITY

- Land must currently be used for growing at time of application.
- Applicant must have control of the land by lease or ownership for the length of the contract (five years).





## MAINTENANCE

Management of the High Tunnel System will depend on weather conditions. We strongly recommend that plastic high tunnel covers are removed after each growing season to prevent the structure from collapsing under extreme snow or ice loads. Consult the manufacturer's specifications for climate condition management.

You must maintain the high tunnel for five years and replace any damaged parts at your own cost. You are responsible for the repair or replacement of a high tunnel damaged by ice, snow, wind, fire, flood, animals, or other causes.

## GETTING STARTED

All NRCS financial and technical assistance programs are voluntary. Through one-on-one, personalized advice, we work with farmers, producers, and private forest landowners to identify the best solutions for their unique conservation and business goals. By doing so, we help ensure the health of our natural resources and the long-term sustainability of American agriculture. The NRCS offers technical advice and conservation planning assistance at no cost to the producers we serve. Producers may choose to apply for financial assistance to help implement the conservation practices outlined in their plan.

If you are interested in installing a High Tunnel System or learning more about conservation choices for your land, contact the NRCS office at your local USDA Service Center.

To find your local USDA Service Center, go to:  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center)



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## RELATED CONSERVATION PRACTICES

Many growers who install a High Tunnel System also adopt other conservation practices to improve soil health and water management.

Below is a list of related practices that may work well with a High Tunnel System:

- Irrigation practices, including pipeline and microirrigation
- Wildlife Habitat Planting
- Low Tunnel System
- Mulching
- Cover Crop
- Consider adding conservation cover to avoid exposed soil during and immediately after high tunnel construction.

