## NRCS Assistance

Through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) NRCS offers financial assistance to eligible producers to install high tunnel systems through the High Tunnel System Initiative.

Initiative requirements include:

- High tunnel structures must be planned, designed, and constructed according to manufacturer's recommendations to withstand local climatic conditions for a 5-year lifespan.
- Payments are based on a national payment schedule. Contact your local NRCS office for more information.
- Structures must be from a manufacturer's kit and be constructed of metal, wood, or durable plastic bow frames and be at least 6 feet in height.
- Structures are to be covered with (as a minimum) a 6-mil greenhouse-grade, UV-resistant polyethylene cover.
- Prior to payment approval, structures must be capable of meeting the objectives of the practice which includes extending the growing season.
- Participants must meet all EQIP eligibility requirements including having a Farm Service Agency Farm Serial Number.
- High Tunnel Systems are eligible on cropland only. Crops must be planted in the natural soil profile.
- Not included in the Initiative are greenhouses, portable pots, low tunnels, and single row covers.

*Please note that this list is not all-inclusive. Visit your local NRCS office for more information.*

**For more information about the NRCS High Tunnel System Initiative, please visit www.ky.nrcs.usda.gov www.nrcs.usda.gov**

**Or contact your local USDA Service Center**



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# Kentucky NRCS High Tunnel System Initiative

USDA NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

## What is a High Tunnel System?

A High Tunnel System is a crop production system using a plastic covered tunnel structure that is at least six feet in height. High tunnels are used to extend the growing season of vegetable and other specialty crops planted in the natural soil profile within the covered area in a resource-conserving manner.

## Why Use High Tunnel Systems?

A High Tunnel System is used to:

- Extend the growing season to increase consumption of locally-grown fresh food
- Reduce dependency on non-renewable energy resources
- Reduce air emissions by decreasing the distance to transport food from producers to consumers
- Improve water quality by reducing nutrient and pesticide transport
- Improve plant and soil quality

## Where Are High Tunnels Used?

A high tunnel system may be used where vegetable or other specialty crops are grown in open field conditions and extension of the growing season is needed to continue providing fresh local crops due to climate conditions. The NRCS Initiative does not apply to greenhouses, low tunnel systems that cover single crop rows, or crops grown on tables, benches, portable pots, etc.

The high tunnel structure covers several crop rows, is wide enough to allow the crop to grow to maturity under the tunnel, and is tall enough to accommodate spraying, cultivating, and harvest with the intact tunnel.

## General Description and Resource Conservation

In general, a single layer of plastic on the high tunnel may provide one hardiness zone of protection from cold temperatures. A row cover within the structure or a second layer of plastic can be used to provide another possible zone of protection.

Passive 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.

Water runoff from the structure or from other nearby sources can cause erosion and ponding issues that must be addressed by appropriate combinations of other practices such as diversions, underground outlets, and critical area plantings.

Additional management practices including nutrient and pest management, or conservation crop rotation may be necessary to achieve conservation purposes.

Commercially available structures are made in numerous widths and lengths typically ranging from 14 to 30 feet wide by 80 to 96 feet long.