

HIGH TUNNEL SYSTEM INITIATIVE

Background

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will assist producers to extend the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner through the High Tunnel System Initiative (HTSI). The initiative has the potential to assist producers in addressing a resource concern by improving plant quality, improving soil quality, and reducing nutrient and pesticide transport.

The seasonal high tunnel practice is gaining recognition in many populated or urbanized areas. NRCS must consider and support all producers who submit an application regardless of where their operation is located. It is important to note that general program eligibility is not limited based on zoning. There is a common misconception that areas zoned as “urban” or “residential” (or other similar zoning types) are not eligible based on the zoning classification.

However, while the applicant and land may meet program eligibility requirements, zoning or other local regulations may restrict a participant from installing certain conservation practices (CPs). Participants who carry out CPs are responsible for obtaining the authorities, rights, easements, permits, or other approvals necessary for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of the CPs in adherence with the applicable laws and regulations.

Approved Land Use

- Crop

Approved Resource Concerns

- Soil Quality Degradation–Organic Matter Depletion
- Water Quality Degradation–Nutrients in Surface Water
- Water Quality Degradation–Pesticides in Surface Water
- Degraded Plant Condition–Undesirable Plant Productivity and Health

Priority

- All applicants who provide documentation they are participating in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) land tenure provisions and are competing in the designated Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) beginning farmer or rancher (BF/R) or socially disadvantaged farmer or rancher (SDF/R), will be assigned “**High**” priority status in ProTracts. Applicants certifying as veteran beginning farmer or rancher (VBF/R) and participating in CRP land tenure provisions will have their applications selected for funding prior to any other “High” priority applicants.

National Ranking Questions

- National ranking questions are consistent for all EQIP applications; however, only questions 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 5a, 5b, 7b, and 9a apply to the NSHTI. All other national questions shall be answered “No. ”

State Ranking Questions

1. Answer ALL of the following criteria that apply regarding the project’s impact on addressing resource concerns.

HIGH TUNNEL SYSTEM INITIATIVE

- a. The schedule of operations includes a high tunnel system which will assist the producer to improve plant productivity, health, and vigor. (150 points)
 - b. The schedule of operations includes conservation practices (CPs) or supports the use of existing CPs (such as cover crops and residue management) that will result in a positive Soil Condition Index (SCI) score as determined by Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation 2 (RUSLE 2). (50 points)
 - c. The schedule of operations includes supporting CPs necessary to support a new or existing high tunnel system in order to address soil erosion. (50 points)
2. Answer ONE of the following criteria that apply regarding the project's ability to address excess nutrients and organics in surface water.
- a. The Schedule of Operations includes a high tunnel system which will assist the producer to reduce excess nutrients and organics in surface water from a field that adjoins a designated impaired water body (Total Maximum Daily Load [TMDL], 303d, etc.). (75 points)
 - b. The Schedule of Operations includes a high tunnel system which will assist the producer to reduce excess nutrients and organics in surface water from a field that adjoins a non-impaired water body. (25 points)
3. Answer ONE of the following criteria that apply regarding the project's ability to address harmful levels of pesticides in surface water.
- a. The Schedule of Operations includes a high tunnel system which will assist the producer to reduce harmful levels of pesticides in surface water from a field that adjoins a designated impaired water body (TMDL, 303d, etc.). (75 points)
 - b. The Schedule of Operations includes a high tunnel system which will assist the producer to reduce harmful levels of pesticides in surface water from a field that adjoins a non-impaired water body. (25 points)

Local Ranking Questions

1. Soil health is improved by no soil disturbance, diverse crop rotation, residue cover or growing plant cover year round, and living roots growing year round. (100 points)
2. Participant is organic certified or will be transitioning to organic production on the land under contract. (75 points)
3. Participant requested a conservation plan for this application prior to August 31, 2018. (50 points)

HIGH TUNNEL SYSTEM INITIATIVE

4. Application was deferred from a previous funding period in the Program Contracts System.
(25 points)

Core Practice

325 HIGH TUNNEL SYSTEM

Supporting Practices

102 COMPREHENSIVE NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
104 NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT PLAN
114 INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT PLAN
154 IPM HERBICIDE RESISTANCE WEED CONSERVATION PLAN
328 CONSERVATION CROP ROTATION
340 COVER CROP
430 IRRIGATION PIPELINE
441 IRRIGATION SYSTEM, MICROIRRIGATION
484 MULCHING
590 NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT
595 INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT
642 WATER WELL