Growing California With High Tunnel Systems

Incorporating High Tunnels Systems

High tunnels are greenhouse-like structures that modify the growing climate. This system allows farmers to extend the growing season for tender and sensitive crops, like vegetables, herbs, berries, and others. Farmers may even be able to grow crops not typically produced in their area.

High tunnels—constructed from a manufacturer’s kit—are made of metal, wood, or durable plastic frames. They are at least six feet in height and covered with a single layer of polyethylene, polycarbonate, plastic or fabric. High tunnels may be designed with different nonelectrical venting options, end walls, and a door.

High tunnels can extend the growing season and allow for lengthened local marketing of quality produce. They help lower energy and transportation costs. In arid climates, high tunnels may slow evaporation and decrease water use. In some cases, the tunnels may improve pest and nutrient management.

High tunnels have applicability in many farming operations, but the extended growing season and steady income may offer particular advantages to small, limited resource, and organic farmers.

Do you want to:

Grow food in arid ecosystems? Protect greens from frost and sun damage? Use less water and nutrients?

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service can help!

GETTING STARTED...

Go to the Office

California NRCS has 54 offices across the state. NRCS will work with you to help you develop a conservation plan tailored to help assess whether a high tunnel is right for your agricultural needs. We will help you develop a conservation plan based on your priorities and solid science. The plan may also be the basis to apply for financial assistance.

Financial Assistance

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary program widely used on small farms and cropland in California. EQIP offers financial assistance to qualified applicants to offset the cost of conservation practices (see sidebar on back). The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) offers additional opportunities for those already meeting a baseline level of stewardship.

Apply

Any time during the year. Eligible projects will be evaluated, prioritized and selected for funding as budget allocations permit.
No matter where you farm in California, seasonal high tunnels can help. In desert areas they protect crops from intense sun and blowing sand. In coastal and desert areas they provide a shield against wind damage—protecting the quality of fruit and cut flowers. Seasonal High Tunnels also help specialty crop growers statewide realize the advantage of selling during the more lucrative “shoulder seasons” slightly before or after the traditional harvest.

**About NRCS, FSA and RMA**

In more than 80 years of helping farmers, ranchers and private forestland owners, NRCS has assembled technical standards (like those in the sidebar at right) to address natural resource concerns. The USDA’s Farm Services Agency (FSA) and Risk Management Agency (RMA) provide other critical resources such as farm loans, crop insurance and disaster assistance.