



Conservation Programs & Practices for: High Tunnel Systems

About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) works with agricultural and forest producers to protect and conserve natural resources on our nation's private lands.

NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the current Farm Bill (Agricultural Act of 2014), and offers financial and technical assistance to landowners to address high priority resource concerns through the implementation of conservation practices. Contact your local NRCS field office for assistance.

The 2014 Farm Bill

The 2014 Farm Bill, enacted on February 7, 2014, offers voluntary conservation programs that benefit both agricultural and forest producers and the environment.

The conservation provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill continue to build on the conservation gains made by U.S. citizens over the past decades and previous farm bills.

Contact NRCS:

Massachusetts USDA Service Centers

Greenfield: 413-772-0384 ext.3
Hadley: 413-585-1000 ext. 3
Holden: 508-829-4477 ext. 3
Pittsfield: 413-443-1776 ext. 3
Westford: 978-692-1904 ext. 3
West Wareham: 508-295-5151 ext. 2
West Yarmouth: 508-771-6476

The High Tunnel System for Crops is a conservation practice available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). This practice helps agricultural producers to extend the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner.

What is a high tunnel?

High tunnels (also known as hoop houses) are structures that modify the growing climate, allowing for tender, sensitive, and specialty crops like certain varieties of vegetables, herbs, berries, and others to grow where they otherwise may not.

High tunnels are constructed of metal bow frames with wood framed ends, at least six feet in height, and are covered with one or two layers of polyethylene.

What will EQIP pay for?

NRCS provides financial assistance for seasonal high tunnels. Plants must be planted in the ground or in permanent raised beds, not containerized.

Since water runoff from high tunnels can cause erosion, pooling and other environmental concerns, additional conservation practices may be installed in concert with the installation of a high tunnel. These include:

- Crop rotation
- Contour buffer strips
- Cover crop
- Filter strip
- Irrigation pipeline
- Micro-irrigation
- Irrigation water management
- Mulching
- Nutrient management
- Pumping plant

Visit our website for current payment rates. There are no restrictions on the number or size of seasonal high tunnels.



Courtesy Flats Mentor Farm



Diane Petit, NRCS

NRCS Conservation Programs & Practices for High Tunnel Systems

Why high tunnels?

High tunnel systems provide conservation benefits, such as improved plant, water and soil quality, as well as reduced disease pressure.

High tunnels can lengthen the season for marketing local produce, which increases sustainability while lowering energy and transportation inputs.

An extended growing season and steady income can help small, limited resource, and organic farmers, and assist producers transitioning to specialty crops.

A high tunnel may help you address a natural resource concern by:

- improving plant quality
- improving soil quality
- reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation
- improving air quality through reduced transportation inputs
- reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce



Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP helps promote farm and forest production by enhancing the environmental quality of soil, water, air, plants and animals.

Who can apply?

- To qualify for a high tunnel system, you must:
 - Be an agricultural producer.
 - Install the high tunnel on existing cultivated land.

Other considerations

- The land must currently be in agricultural production.
- Approved applicants will receive financial assistance for a high tunnel and related conservation practices that help achieve the expected conservation benefits or mitigate potential negative effects from installing the high tunnel.
- The high tunnel must be purchased as a manufactured kit from a list of approved vendors, be at least six feet high and have an expected lifespan of at least four years.
- Electrical, heating or ventilation systems may be added to the high tunnel at the applicant's own expense.
- You must complete a short questionnaire annually about nutrients and pesticides used, crop yields and crop season dates to help us evaluate the effects of your high tunnel on natural resources.

How and when do I apply?

- Applications may be submitted anytime. All applications will be evaluated periodically in a competitive ranking process as funding becomes available. Ranking criteria is available on our website.
- To apply, you will need to file the following forms (also on our website):
 - Conservation Program Application (CCC-1200)
 - Adjusted Gross Income Certification (CCC-926)
 - Highly Erodible Land & Wetland Conservation Certification (AD-1026)
- A DUNS number, and registration and yearly renewal in the System for Award Management (SAM) will be required before contracts can be obligated and for payment eligibility determination.
- If your application is funded, you will be required to install and maintain your conservation practices according to NRCS standards.

Conservation Plans & Conservation Activity Plans

Your program application must be supported by an NRCS approved conservation plan, which provides documentation of the practices that could be used to address your natural resource concerns. We will work with you to develop an approved conservation plan.

You may also apply for financial assistance to hire Technical Service Providers (TSP) to develop a specialty plans called Conservation Activity Plans (CAP) to address certain land use activities or specific resource needs on your land.

Call your local NRCS field office or visit us online for more information.