



What are high tunnels?

Seasonal high tunnels are plastic-covered structures that enable farmers to have crops ready earlier or later in the season. In high tunnels, plants are grown directly in the ground, and the sun's heat regulates the temperature inside.

PROGRAMS

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, or NRCS, offered seasonal high tunnels as a conservation practice for the first time in 2009 as part of a three-year trial to determine their effectiveness in conserving water, improving soil health, increasing yields, and reducing transport of agricultural pesticides.

NRCS continues to provide outreach, technical, and financial assistance for high tunnels. Since 2009, through NRCS, USDA has provided assistance to help producers build over 9,825 high tunnels on farms around the country.

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP, a Farm Bill program that offers financial assistance to farmers and ranchers, enables producers to install

conservation tools like the high tunnel.

Under EQIP, the Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative is a voluntary program that provides financial and technical assistance to help producers extend the growing season for high value crops in an environmentally safe manner. This initiative may assist producers in addressing a resource concern by: improving plant quality, improving soil quality, reducing nutrient and pesticide transportation, improving air quality through reduced transportation inputs, and reducing energy use by providing consumers with a local source of fresh produce.

High tunnels are a key part of USDA's Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food Initiative, which coordinates USDA's work on local and regional food systems.

+ RUN DOWN

Top 5 states with high tunnels

With NRCS help since 2009

- 1 Missouri (542)
- 2 Alaska (513)
- 3 Michigan (473)
- 4 Kentucky (427)
- 5 Wisconsin (412)

BY THE NUMBERS

9,825

High tunnels built in the U.S. since 2009, with an obligation total of \$56.8 million.

48%

Increase in high tunnels built from 2009-2013, going from about 2,000 to 3,000.



Maine had the largest increase year-to-year of high tunnels from 2009-2013 with over 1,300 percent. NRCS invested \$163,000 in Maine to help build 188 high tunnels in 2009. In 2013, the investment rose to \$2.3 million for 331 high tunnels statewide.

high tunnels

WORD FOR WORD



“With the high tunnel and row covers, I was taking spinach out of it in January,”

JIM FAULKNER said after receiving NRCS funding for a high tunnel on his joint-operated Massachusetts farm. Jim attributes most of his farming knowledge to NRCS.



“I’m incredibly grateful to have the high tunnel and the new potential it provides my farm,”

KATE PAUL said after she received NRCS’ technical and financial assistance that enabled her to meet her conservation planning objectives. Kate runs a community supported agricultural operation in Minnesota.



“My passion is to give and grow,”

AVON STANDARD said of the fruits and vegetables that he provides free to family, friends and the surrounding community. Avon is the first urban farmer in Cleveland to build a high tunnel as part of the Cleveland Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot Project administered by NRCS.



MULTIMEDIA

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