

Environmental Quality Incentives Program High Tunnel Pilot Project 2010 South Carolina Fact Sheet



Apply by March 12, 2010

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) is a voluntary conservation program for individuals engaged in livestock, forestry or agricultural production, including organic production. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to implement conservation practices on eligible agricultural land.

High Tunnel Pilot Project Overview

NRCS is conducting a high tunnel (or hoop house) pilot project for three years. Agricultural producers can apply to receive financial and technical assistance to help NRCS test the conservation benefits and effects of high tunnels in practical, real-world situations.

USDA announced the pilot project under the *Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food* initiative. High tunnels can lengthen the timeframe for local marketing of produce, which increases sustainability while lowering energy and transportation inputs. In arid climates, high tunnels may slow evaporation and decrease irrigation water use. An extended growing season and more steady income may offer advantages to small, limited resource, and organic farmers. They can also assist producers transitioning to speciality crops or to organic systems.



NRCS is conducting a 3-year high tunnel (or hoop house) pilot project.

A high tunnel is a temporary plastic structure, at least six feet in height, which modifies the climate to create more favorable conditions for crops.



Natural Resource Benefits

improved plant quality
improved soil quality
improved water quality through methods such as reduced nutrient and pesticide transport

Approved applicants will receive financial assistance for their high tunnel system and related additional conservation practices that help achieve the expected conservation benefits or mitigate any potential negative effects from installing these systems.

- Maximum area allowable for cost-share is **2,178 square feet (5% of 1 acre)** per operation. The area may include multiple smaller structures. For example, instead of one house that is 30x70, two houses could be constructed that are 20x50 each.
- Systems are required to be built from **pre-manufactured kits (no homemade kits will be cost-shared)**. Kits consisting of rigid panels or components are not allowed.
- Tunnel frame must be made of metal, wood, or durable plastic and the house must be **at least 6 feet in height**.
- The life span of the practice will be **4 years**.
- In climate conditions where snow loads may damage the structure, the tunnel cover should be removed at the end of the growing season.

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- Participants will not be allowed to add **electricity, heat, or mechanical ventilation** to the structure, even at their own expense.
- The practice must be applied on existing cultivated cropland.
- Crops must be grown *in the natural soil profile*.
- Containers of any kind are not allowed.
- Black mesh for shade or insect control can be used at participant's expense.
- An irrigation system (Microirrigation 441) can be planned as a supporting practice according to normal EQIP criteria. For EQIP cost share, the land has to be irrigated 2 out of the last 5 years.
- NRCS does not consider seasonal high tunnels to be engineering practices, therefore no engineering job approval is necessary.
- The practice standard requires RUSLE2 and soil quality (SCI) calculations for the area where the structure will reside.
- If structure is moved, it must still be on the contract area.
- Additional practices should be considered to address increased runoff volumes around the structure (cover crop/diversion/grassed waterway, etc.)
- Water supply for crops grown within the structure should be considered, regardless of cost-share status, due to rainfall exclusion.

Applications

The high tunnel pilot project is offered under the **Environmental Quality Incentives Program Organic Initiative and Speciality Crop** funding pools. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but each fiscal year has funding cutoff dates.

Financial Assistance

During the pilot project, successful applicants will receive about **75 percent of the cost of one** high tunnel system and related costs. Beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers can receive about **90 percent of the costs**.

Cost Share Rates for High Tunnels

- \$1.55 per square foot
- \$1.86 per square foot for beginning, socially disadvantaged, and limited resource farmers.

For More Information

To apply for EQIP funds, farmers should visit their local USDA service center to complete the application process by March 12, 2010.

In order to receive funds through the EQIP for any conservation practice, an application must be approved and a contract signed prior to any work being done.

When applying for EQIP, especially when applying for the first time, producers should be mindful that they will need to fill out forms providing USDA with information that confirms that they are eligible to participate.

NRCS staff in USDA Service Centers are available to help producers through this application process.

For more information about EQIP and this new High Tunnel practice, visit your local **SC NRCS field office**.

You can find out more about SC NRCS by visiting www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov.

To be considered for Fiscal Year 2010 funding under the SC NRCS High Tunnel Pilot Study, producers should submit applications to their local NRCS office by March 12, 2010.