

Nevada

February 2010

High Tunnels Pilot Project

OVERVIEW

NRCS is conducting a 3-year high tunnel, or hoop house, pilot project. 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. The high tunnel pilot study will help determine possible conservation benefits. High tunnels improve plant, water and soil quality, as well as pest and nutrient management.

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 steady income may offer advantages to small, limited resource, and organic farmers. They can also assist producers transitioning to specialty crops.

DEFINITION

High tunnels 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 or plastic bow frames at least 6 feet in height, covered with a single layer of polyethylene.

For this pilot project, plants must be planted in the ground or in permanent raised beds, and not containerized. Since water runoff from high tunnels can cause erosion, pooling, and other environmental concerns, conservation practices, such as runoff management, irrigation, drain structures for water control, crop rotation, and critical area planting, may be installed. These additional practices will need to be planned and installed as a condition for the installation of a high tunnel. Additional practices that might be considered as part of a conservation plan include nutrient and pest management, cover crop, and irrigation water management.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

To qualify, the applicant must:

- be an agricultural producer
- install the high tunnel(s) on existing cultivated land
- raise or sell \$1,000 worth of agricultural products annually

The land must:

- have been cultivated for at least two years prior to the installation of the high tunnel.

CONSIDERATIONS

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

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installing these high tunnel systems. The maximum size for the high tunnel system(s) is 5 percent of one acre, or a total of 2,178 square feet. The high tunnel systems must be purchased as manufactured kits, will not include electrical, heating or ventilation systems, be at least 6 feet high, and have an expected life of at least 4 years.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

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



Photos courtesy of FullCircleCompost.com

EVALUATING THE CONSERVATION BENEFITS

Participating growers will help evaluate the effects of high tunnels on natural resources. A short questionnaire will be completed annually covering nutrients and pesticides used and crop season dates.

APPLICATIONS

The high tunnel pilot project is offered under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Organic Initiative and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) Program of the 2008 Farm Bill. Applications are accepted on a continuous basis, but each fiscal year has funding cutoff dates.

MORE INFORMATION

The fact sheet is intended as a general overview of the high tunnel pilot project. For application assistance and complete details, contact your closest NRCS office.

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