



United States Department of Agriculture

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Delaware

Conservation Fact Sheet

High Tunnels

About NRCS

The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Delaware works to protect and conserve natural resources on private lands.

As part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, NRCS administers conservation programs funded primarily through the 2014 Farm Bill.

The conservation provisions in the 2014 Farm Bill streamline existing programs and have created new programs to address high priority environmental protection goals.

The 2014 Farm Bill targets financial assistance to beginning, limited resource, socially disadvantaged farmers and veteran farmers.

Contact your local NRCS field office for more information.



Contact NRCS:

Delaware
USDA Service Centers

Kent County: 302-741-2600

New Castle County: 302-832-3100

Sussex County: 302-856-3990

(Select extension 3 for NRCS)

Purpose

Seasonal High Tunnels is a project under the “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels to increase the availability of locally-grown produce in a conservation-friendly way. The USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offers financial assistance to help cover the costs of high tunnel systems through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Agricultural Management Assistance (AMA) program.

Why Seasonal High Tunnels

A seasonal high tunnel is a polyethylene-covered structure at least 6 feet in height, which modifies the climate to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetable and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it.

Potential Resource Benefits of High Tunnels

Potential natural resource benefits from using tunnel structures include: (1) improved plant quality, (2) improved soil quality, and (3) improved water quality through methods such as reduced nutrient and pesticide transport.

Features of High Tunnels

Commercially available high tunnel structures are made in numerous widths and lengths. The high tunnels are constructed of metal or plastic bow frames that are covered with a minimum of 6 mil polyethylene. Ventilation is achieved by means of a combination of roll-up side vents, end vents, and occasionally roof vents. Generally, the end walls are framed-in to create door and ventilation areas. The high tunnel structure covers several crop rows; is wide enough to allow crop growth to full maturity under the tunnel; and is tall enough to allow spraying, cultivation and harvest to occur with the tunnel intact.





High Tunnels

Financial Assistance

High tunnel systems may be eligible for financial assistance through the EQIP and AMA. Financial assistance is offered based on the state's payment rate in the requested fiscal year. For FY 2016, the payment rate in Delaware is \$2.91/square foot (\$3.50/sq. ft. for Historically Underserved customers) with a maximum payment of \$8,750 per individual or entity.

More Information

Contact your local USDA Service Center to speak to one of our conservation professionals to begin the program application process.

Information and application forms are available online at www.de.nrcs.usda.gov.



An example of a typical high tunnel structure in Delaware.

Eligibility Criteria for High Tunnel Program Participants:

- Applicant must be an eligible producer who is currently engaged in agricultural production.
- High tunnels are eligible to be constructed on existing cultivated cropland. Sites must be approved by NRCS.
- High tunnels are to be constructed using commercially manufactured packages or kits. NRCS will verify authenticity through bills and will monitor construction progress.
- Alterations such as adding electricity, heat, or active ventilation are allowed under this program; however, NRCS doesn't provide financial assistance for installation or maintenance.
- All crop production must be done in the soil profile. No potted or containerized production will be allowed in these structures, though raised beds may be used.
- No alternative uses for the high tunnel structure are allowed during non-growing season months-- no storage, no potted or containerized plant production, no housing of livestock or poultry.
- Participants will be responsible for operation and maintenance of these structures including clearing snow from on and around the high tunnel.

Participant Responsibilities

Participants will be asked to assist NRCS with evaluating the effectiveness of high tunnels by providing the following information when requested:

- First year only – cost of the seasonal high tunnel system.
- Annual maintenance costs and requirements for the seasonal high tunnel system.
- How long did the structure extend the growing season?
- Did the seasonal high tunnel increase production? If so, how much?
- What rates of nutrients (N, P and K) were applied before and after the seasonal high tunnel structure was installed?
- What rates of pesticides (product and rate) were applied before and after the seasonal high tunnel structure was installed?
- Other observations and evaluations. Recommendations to improve their effectiveness.