Funding available to help farmers extend the growing season while protecting natural resources

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will help farmers to establish high tunnels - also known as hoop houses to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.

A high tunnel is a greenhouse-like structure, at least six feet in height, which modifies the climate inside to create more favorable growing conditions for vegetable and other specialty crops grown in the natural soil beneath it. Participating farms can receive funding for a high tunnel up to $10,000. NRCS provides financial assistance for the project through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Minimum eligibility requirements must be met to be eligible for funding. EQIP is a competitive program and applications will go through a ranking process. The highest scored applications will receive funding until funds are exhausted. Here are two frequently asked questions:

Are Seasonal High Tunnel Systems the same as Greenhouses?
No. Seasonal high tunnel systems unlike greenhouses do not necessarily have electrical, heating or mechanical ventilation systems. The seasonal high tunnel system depends on the plastic covering to raise temperatures within the structure. Temperatures during the growing season are controlled by using manual roll-up side vents and by opening end doors to provide ventilation. Unlike greenhouses, seasonal high tunnel systems as indicated by their name are seasonal and are considered temporary structures.

What are the structure requirements for a Seasonal High Tunnel System under EQIP?
Under EQIP the seasonal high tunnel system must be obtained as a pre-fabricated kit directly from the manufacturer or from a supplier. The frame shall be constructed of metal, wood, or durable plastic and be at least 6 feet in height. The plastic cover must be, at a minimum, a 6-mil greenhouse-grade, UV resistant polyethylene. Individuals must work closely with their manufacturer or supplier to plan, design and construct the structure in accordance with the manufacturer’s specific recommendations.

More on-line:
Growing all Seasons: High Tunnels
www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/organic/?cid=nrceprd1364702
High Tunnel Success Stories
www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/organic/?cid=nrceprd1411413

Local farmers who would like to sign-up for the high tunnel pilot should call or visit the NRCS office at a local USDA service center. For Hennepin, Anoka and Sherburne County, contact the USDA- NRCS Elk River Service Center 14855 Highway 10 Elk River, MN 55330 763-241-1170 ext. 3

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