

Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative



FEEDING URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH FRESH, LOCAL AND SUSTAINABLE CROP PRODUCTION

FAQ



What is a seasonal high tunnel?

Seasonal high tunnels are unheated, plastic-covered structures that provide an intermediate level of environmental protection and control compared to open field conditions and heated greenhouses. They are easy to build and maintain. They provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season, reduce or avoid use of pesticides, and reduce runoff and leaching of nitrogen into the soil.

The frame can either be metal or fiberglass. Plastic frames should be UV (ultraviolet light) protected. High tunnels are usually covered with a single layer of plastic and are passively ventilated using roll-up side and end walls, which can be opened or removed.

What is a “manufactured” high tunnel?

To be eligible for NRCS financial assistance, seasonal high tunnels must be purchased as a kit with warranties for wind and snow damage and installation instructions from a manufacturer. Seasonal high tunnels must be planned, designed and constructed in accordance with the manufacturer’s recommendations.

Interested in extending your growing season?

At USDA, we believe it’s important for all communities to have access to fresh, locally-grown foods—especially in places where farm-fresh produce isn’t readily available or accessible. That’s why the **USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** is offering financial assistance to help farmers, Indian Tribes, and community organizations expand their local crop production by installing a seasonal high tunnel. To find out if a seasonal high tunnel is right for you, and to apply, contact your local USDA Service Center.



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Eligibility

The Seasonal High Tunnel Initiative is open to individuals, businesses, non-profits, Indian Tribes, legal entities, or joint operations who are either currently engaged in crop production OR who have a demonstrated interest in crop production. Examples of eligible groups include individual farmers, farm entities, or grower groups which may consist of community garden organizations, non-profits, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) operations, and more.

Participants new to USDA, will need to register with the USDA Farm Service Agency before applying for the high tunnel through NRCS.

The grower or grower group must already be engaged in production (for example, an established community garden or an established farm), or has demonstrated an interest in production

Keep in mind that this program is not intended for backyard hobby gardens or orchards—rather, it's intended to support agricultural enterprises that provide produce for local communities.

Seasonal high tunnels are offered through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP). There are a few other basic eligibility requirements that apply to EQIP and other NRCS programs. Learn more by visiting your local USDA Service Center or www.or.nrcs.usda.gov.

Can I install a used seasonal high tunnel?

You can install a used structure, but it needs to be obtained from a commercial source. The used seasonal high tunnel must be planned, designed and constructed in accordance with manufacturer's recommendations and backed by a warranty from the manufacturer

Can I construct my own high tunnel?

No, seasonal high tunnels must be obtained from a commercial source in order to receive NRCS funding. There are commercial sources available in Oregon and across the nation that provide seasonal high tunnel kits.

Is there a size limit for the seasonal high tunnel?

No. There is no size limit to the seasonal high tunnel. However there is a practice payment cap for NRCS financial assistance.

Can I install electricity to power heating or cooling units in the seasonal high tunnel?

Under the seasonal high tunnel initiative financial assistance is provided only for the structure itself. Electricity, venting systems, lighting etc. can be installed providing the additions meets manufacturer's designs and specifications. However, the grower is responsible for those costs.

Are there any limitations on how much financial assistance I can receive for a seasonal high tunnel?

Oregon NRCS has set a practice payment cap of \$6,500 for seasonal high tunnels. If you qualify as a historically underserved producer, you may be eligible for a higher payment cap of \$7,725. An applicant can apply for one or more seasonal high tunnels, as long as the total cost does not exceed the established practice payment cap.

If I already have a high tunnel, can I apply for another one?

Yes. An applicant can apply for a seasonal high tunnel even if the grower already has an existing high tunnel.

Can I apply for a seasonal high tunnel under multiple NRCS EQIP-based initiatives?

Yes. An applicant can apply for a seasonal high tunnel under other EQIP initiatives. Each initiative has its own requirements and a separate application process. It is important to note that the practice payment cap applies to all programs in Oregon that offers the seasonal high tunnel.

Can I apply for a seasonal high tunnel under the Organic Initiative?

Yes! You may be eligible to apply for a seasonal high tunnel under the organic initiative if you are a certified or transitioning organic farmer. The Organic Initiative offers seasonal high tunnels as a practice and includes a separate set of requirements and application process. It is important to note that the practice payment cap applies to the organic initiative.

Can seasonal high tunnels be portable?

No. Regulations do not currently allow for portable high tunnels.

Can I leave the seasonal high tunnel up all year?

Management of the seasonal high tunnel will depend on climatic conditions. Under extreme snow loads, wind condition, or intense duration of sunlight the plastic cover of the seasonal high tunnel can be removed or replaced by shade cloth. Consult manufacture's specifications and climate condition management in your area.

Are there limitations on where I can install the high tunnel?

The seasonal high tunnel can be placed on land capable of producing crops and where crops are grown in the natural soil profile. Raised beds may be installed but cannot be higher than 12 inches in depth.

Are there limitations to what can be produced in high tunnels?

Yes. Production that is not allowed includes: crops grown on benches or in pots, livestock or poultry and crops that are federally restricted such as marijuana. High tunnels can be used for crops that are grown in the natural soil profile or in raised beds.



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