

Natural Resources Conservation Service



# New Mexico High Tunnel Fact Sheet

## What is a High Tunnel (HT) System?

An enclosed polyethylene, plastic, or fabric covered structure that is used to cover and protect crops from sun, wind, excessive rainfall or cold, to extend the growing season in an environmentally safe manner.

The high tunnel frame must be constructed of metal, wood, or durable plastic; and be at least 6 feet in height at the peak of the structure. If required for enclosure, end wall covering may be greenhouse-grade plastic, polycarbonate, wood or other.

## What is the purpose of the practice?

To improve plant health and vigor

## What is a High Tunnel?

To meet the high tunnel system (325 NRCS Practice) standard the high tunnels must be planned, designed, and constructed from a manufactured kit in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations.

## Do I need irrigation?

Yes, the structure needs to be irrigated and located near a viable water source for irrigation.

## What thickness of high tunnel covering is needed?

For polyethylene covers use a minimum 6-mil greenhouse grade, UV resistant material with a minimum 4 year lifespan.

## Are funds or financial assistance available to build a High Tunnel?

Yes, see next question.

### Can an applicant receive funding for a High Tunnel under multiple programs (EQIP, Organic or HTI)?

An applicant can sign up for a seasonal high tunnel under any program which it is offered. The applicant must make separate application for each program.

### Can high tunnels be portable?

Yes, high tunnels can be portable, either physically moving the structure or having the structure on skids (if that is part of the manufacturer's specifications). If the plan is to utilize a portable seasonal high tunnel, a conservation plan must first be developed to identify the appropriate areas for the high tunnel to be placed.

### Can a participant construct their own high tunnel funded through NRCS programs?

No, structures need to be obtained from a commercial source. There are commercial sources nationally that can assist participants in selecting the right seasonal high tunnel.

### Can a participant leave up the high tunnel all year?

In climate conditions where snow loads may damage the structure, the tunnel cover should be removed at the end of the growing season. If the manufacturer's specification identifies higher load ratings then it is permissible to leave the cover on. Seasonal high tunnels in areas of low snow and ice loads may be used all year; check with the manufacturer for other conditions that may apply.

### Are there limitations as to where this practice would apply?

This practice applies to lands capable of producing crops. Crops under a high tunnel must be grown in the natural soil profile or in raised beds not to exceed 12" in depth. Raised beds may be installed to improve soil condition, fertility and access.

### Can I use the high tunnel for equipment small livestock (chickens, turkeys, etc.)?

No, high tunnels are for growing food crops only.



High Tunnel in Espanola, NM



High Tunnel in Chama, NM