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## FUNDING AVAILABLE TO HELP FARMERS EXTEND THE GROWING SEASON WHILE PROTECTING NATURAL RESOURCES

Richmond, VA. (January 19, 2010) – The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced a new pilot project under the 'Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food' initiative for farmers to establish high tunnels - also known as hoop houses - to increase the availability of locally grown produce in a conservation-friendly way.



A seasonal 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. This pilot will test the potential conservation benefits of growing crops under these structures. Participating farms can receive funding for one high tunnel. High tunnels in the study can cover as much as five percent of one acre or approximately a 30 by 72 foot structure. The incentive payment is based on the square foot of the structure not to exceed a maximum payment of \$4,570 per producer for Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) producers and \$5,490 for Historically Underserved (HU) clients. Growers will be required to maintain nutrient and pesticide application records during the project.

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. USDA service center locations are listed on-line at <http://offices.usda.gov> or in the phone book under Federal Government, U.S. Department of Agriculture. General program information is available on the NRCS Virginia website at [www.va.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.va.nrcs.usda.gov).

“Virginia is one of approximately 40 states participating in a three-year study that will verify if high tunnels are effective in reducing pesticide use, keeping vital nutrients in the soil, extending the growing season, increasing yields, and providing other benefits to growers,” said Wade Biddix, Assistant State Conservationist for NRCS Programs in Virginia. This idea is not new to Virginia,” says Biddix. “Virginia State University has been successfully using hoop houses at their Randolph Farm to grow melons, berries and other crops.”

Made of ribs of plastic or metal pipe covered with a layer of plastic sheeting, high tunnels are easy to build, maintain and move. High tunnels are used year-round in parts of the country, providing steady incomes to farmers - a significant advantage to owners of small farms, limited-resource farmers and organic producers. NRCS will provide financial assistance for the project through the [Environmental Quality Incentives Program \(EQIP\)](#).

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