



# NEWS RELEASE

## NRCS Natural Resources Conservation Service

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## USDA Provides Update on Seasonal High Tunnel Pilot

*Sign-up period for EQIP Organic funding is now through March 4, 2011*

WASHINGTON – Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan announced that more than 2,400 seasonal high tunnels are being constructed by farmers in 43 states through a pilot project initiated by USDA in fiscal year (FY) 2010.

In Arkansas, producers received more than \$57,000 for 14 high tunnels. Funding for high tunnels is available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) Organic Initiative and the regular EQIP. The sign-up period for EQIP Organic funding is now through March 4, 2011. The regular EQIP sign up for 2011 has ended.

“By capturing solar energy, seasonal high tunnels create favorable conditions enabling farmers to grow vegetables, berries and other specialty crops in climates and at times of the year in which it would otherwise be impossible,” Merrigan said. “Farmers who sell their high tunnel produce locally benefit from the extra income, and the community benefits from the availability of fresh, locally grown food.”

Seasonal high tunnels are structures made of plastic or metal pipe and covered with plastic or other sheeting. Easy to build, maintain and move, they provide an energy-efficient way to extend the growing season. Unlike greenhouses, they require no energy, relying on natural sunlight to modify the climate inside to create favorable conditions for growing vegetables and other specialty crops.

USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is providing financial assistance for seasonal high tunnels as part of a three-year trial to determine their effectiveness in conserving water, reducing pesticide use, maintaining vital soil nutrients, and increasing crop yields.

For a breakdown of FY 2010 high tunnel funding by state, go to <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/success-stories/hightunnels/2010tunneldollars.html>. In most cases, NRCS provides financial assistance equivalent to approximately half the cost of the high tunnel, but historically underserved producers may receive 75 to 90 percent financial assistance. For information on how to apply, visit your local USDA Service Center, found at <http://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>. For more information about the organic initiative in Arkansas, visit [http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip\\_organic.html](http://www.ar.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/eqip_organic.html).

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