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HIGH TUNNEL PILOT PROJECT ANNOUNCED FOR UTAH

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Utah is announcing a signup until February 19 in Salt Lake, Davis, Weber, Tooele, and Morgan counties, and Utah Tribal lands for a new conservation cost share program that uses high tunnel, or hoop houses, which modify the growing climate and allow tender varieties of vegetables, herbs, and berries to grow where they otherwise may not. Applications must be received by February 19 in NRCS field offices in Ogden and Tooele, or those serving Utah Tribal lands.

Made of ribs of plastic or metal pipe covered with a layer of transparent plastic sheeting, manufactured high tunnels are easy to erect, maintain and move. Most are designed with nonelectric venting options. It is noted that plants must be planted in the ground and not containerized.

Under this program, temporary high tunnels can be erected for a good portion of the year to help provide supplementary income to farmers – a significant advantage to owners of small farms, limited-resource farmers and organic producers. Other benefits include the ability to market more locally-produced food. In arid climates, high tunnels may also slow evaporation and decrease the need for irrigation. In all cases, the tunnels may improve pest and nutrient management. Potential environmental concerns associated with high tunnels are increased water runoff and erosion.

Successful applicants will receive cost share on one high tunnel per producer up to a maximum size of 2,178 square feet. NRCS will pay approximately half the cost of the tunnel for most applicants, but historically underserved customers can receive 75 to 90 percent cost share. Participating growers will help evaluate the effects of high tunnels on natural resources.

This on-farm opportunity to evaluate high tunnels is funded through the Agricultural Management Assistance Program (AMA). This follows a 40-state pilot to allow this federal technical agency to evaluate the technology and possible conversion benefits from traditional growing methods. For more information, visit your local USDA Service Center or the Web site at www.ut.nrcs.usda.gov.

The Great Salt Lake RC&D Council (affiliated with NRCS) serves Salt Lake, Davis, Weber, Tooele, and Morgan counties in the areas of community development, land conservation, water management, and land management. For more information about the RC&D or this pilot program, contact Jeff Williams, RC&D coordinator, at 801-524-4254; or visit their Web site at www.greatsaltlakercd.org.

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