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# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Funding available to help farmers extend the growing season while protecting natural resources

AMHERST, Mass. (December 21, 2009) – 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.

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 by **January 15th**. 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 Massachusetts website at [www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov).

"Massachusetts is one of 38 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 Christine Clarke, State Conservationist for NRCS in Massachusetts.

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), the EQIP Organic Initiative and the Agricultural Management Assistance program.

Participating states and territories are Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Pacific Islands, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

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The Natural Resources Conservation Service is an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture that helps people conserve, maintain, and improve our natural resources and environment. NRCS has seven Massachusetts field offices – in Greenfield, Hadley, Holden, Hyannis, Pittsfield, Westford, and West Wareham – that work with local conservation districts and other partners to serve farmers and landowners throughout the commonwealth.

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**NOTE TO EDITORS AND REPORTERS:**

If you would like to include local contact information for your readers, please cite the office below that serves your area. If you have any questions, please call the public affairs contact above or your local office below.

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