

# FUNDING HIGH TUNNELS AT VINE & VIRTUE FARM

*This case study details the experience of Shane and Kenna Kanneberg, owners of Vine & Virtue Farm, in working with the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) to receive funding for two high tunnels. Your experience may be different depending on location, practice, year, and more.*



## Setting the Stage

Shane and Kenna Kanneberg own Vine & Virtue Farm in Seymour, Wisconsin. They started their farm in 2022 after falling in love with local food. They steward their nine acre farm following permaculture principles. As beginning farmers, they utilize NRCS programs to make conservation improvements on their farm that they otherwise could not afford.



## Step 1: Consult the Cookbook

The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) publishes a catalog of fundable conservation practices each year called the Field Office Technical Guide (often fondly referred to as the “cookbook”). The cookbook contains information about conservation practices, eligibility, and cost-share rates. It can be helpful to take note of specific issues on your farm that you’re looking to address and explore possible conservation practices that could address your concerns. One major factor that will determine if you are eligible for funding is whether or not there is a “resource concern” present. NRCS defines a Natural Resource Concern as, “An expected degradation of the soil, water, air, plant, or animal resource base to an extent that the sustainability or intended use of the resource is impaired.”

Shane and Kenna knew they wanted high tunnels (conservation practice) to extend their growing season (resource concern), and to improve plant and soil quality (resource concerns).



## Step 2: Contact Local NRCS

When you have a good idea of some specific conservation concerns or projects you would like to pursue on your farm, it’s time to contact your local NRCS office. Phone and email contact information for local NRCS office staff is searchable by county at [nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center](https://nrcs.usda.gov/contact/find-a-service-center).

Wisconsin Farmers Union Conservation Coordinator, Erin Lenninger is available to assist farmers located in the Fox-Wolf Watershed who would like a personal introduction to local NRCS staff. Erin can even attend an NRCS office visit with you!

Shane and Kenna contacted NRCS staff in Outagamie County to set up a time to discuss funding for high tunnels. They expressed a desire for two high tunnels and shared resource concerns that would make them eligible for funding. As a farmer interested in funding, you are a client of NRCS. Don’t be afraid to advocate for yourself and ask for what you need. NRCS is there to serve you!

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## Step 3: Application Paperwork

After Shane and Kenna worked with their NRCS agent to confirm that the high tunnels would be a good fit for their farm, the paperwork began! Your NRCS agent will guide you through the application process and can complete much of the paperwork for you.

NRCS applications are accepted year-round, but farmers interested in receiving funding during the current fiscal year should apply by November 1. Shane and Kenna submitted their application in fall 2022.



## Step 4: Buy and Build the High Tunnels

Shane and Kenna were awarded funding for their high tunnel in early 2023 at a rate of \$12 per square foot. The farmers were able to request an advance payment equal to 50% of their funding because they qualified as underserved farmers. Shane and Kenna then found an online retailer that sold high tunnel build kits that were NRCS compliant. They made the purchase, sent their receipts to NRCS, and the parts to construct the tunnel were delivered to their farm.

Next, the farmers constructed the high tunnels themselves, which they cited as a hurdle they faced in this process.



## Step 5: Certify the High Tunnels

After the high tunnels were constructed, Shane and Kenna contacted their NRCS agent to let them know. The agent scheduled a time to visit the farm where they inspected the build of the high tunnels. In order to receive the second half of their funding, the practice had to be "certified." This means that NRCS needed to confirm that the practice was installed correctly, following their guidelines. Shane and Kenna recalled that NRCS was quick to schedule farm visits to certify the practices, which ensures that funding moves along more quickly.

Initially, the doors of Shane and Kenna's new high tunnels were not attached correctly, so their NRCS agent requested that they make a change. Shane and Kenna corrected the doors shortly after the visit, sent updated photos to their agent, and then received the rest of their funding about a month later.

## Total Timeline (~10 months):

**Fall 2022:** Shane & Kenna submitted their application for high tunnels to NRCS

**Early 2023:** The farmers were awarded their contract and an advance payment equal to half of the funding

**February 2023 - June 2023:** Shane & Kenna shopped for and built their high tunnels (this process can go more quickly, but Shane and Kenna chose to wait to build their high tunnels)

**July 2023:** The farmers received the second half of their funding after the high tunnels were certified