

Annual-bed System Strawberries at Kilpatrick Family Farm

Michael Kilpatrick

518-218-8595

Michael@kilpatrickfamilyfarm.com

Kilpatrick Family Farm is a mixed vegetable, fruit and poultry farm located in Middle Granville, NY zoned 4b. The majority of our sales are through a 200 member CSA as well as several farmers markets in Saratoga Springs and Glens Falls, NY. We also sell a limited amount of items wholesale through Co-ops, restaurants, and to other CSA's. The farm is approximately 500 acres of owned, rented and leased land. It consists of 40 tillable acres, 100 pasture acres, and the balance, woodlot and scrub. We plant between 12-14 acres of vegetables and fruit every year.

Because of our mixed retail opportunities it is imperative for us to have a wide diversity of crops year-round. Strawberries provide this diversity through our June sales of fresh strawberries and then winter sales of frozen strawberries.

We chose using the annual bed system over matted rows for several reasons:

1. Reduced disease pressure because of the open nature of the plant and relative short lifespan of the crop.
2. Chandler, the variety that we use for this system, has flavorful large berries and an open plant habit, which allows easy identification and harvesting of ripe fruit.
3. Quick turnover of the crop. The fall planting and next spring harvest allows the crop to be in and out of the field relatively quickly, allowing additional cash crops, or cover crops, on that land in the same year.
4. Relatively low labor is required for this system There is none of the runner and flower pruning that is normally associated with matted row system.
5. Because of the short time frame of this crop, perennial weeds are easily controlled mechanically.

The basics of this system are as follows:

First week of August- tips are purchased and propagated in the greenhouse. They are started in 50 cell trays and misted for 30 seconds every 15 minutes for the first week, reducing the frequency every week as they establish in the cells. We also treat them with micronutrients and root shield for increased vigor.

First to second week of September- Ground is prepped, compost and soil amendments are spread, and then raised plastic beds are made. The plants are then set in 3 staggered rows, 12"x12" apart. Beds are mulched between using our Teagle bale chopper.

Middle to end of November- plants are row-covered for the winter. Strawberry plants are highly desirable to deer so we use Typar 518 row-cover, which the deer can't paw through. At this time we also place bait stations filled with Agri3 for vole control under the cover.

End of March- as soon as the snow melts we remove row-cover, check plant health and add 5-10 lbs of nitrogen per acre. Row-cover is then reapplied. We will also do leaf analysis and then add any needed amendments based on recommendations.

End of April- We start checking for blossoms; as soon as 10% of the plants are blossoming we will remove row-cover for good, applying again only for nights that could potentially frost. We also start a consistent irrigation schedule at this time, aiming for at least 1" of water per week.

End of May- We typically begin harvesting berries the last week of May. At this time we will apply bird netting over the entire field to keep cedar waxwings and robins out of the field. The netting is only removed during harvest.

End of June- The last week of berry picking we invite our CSA members for a U-Pick event on the farm, cleaning out the field. As soon as this is done, the netting is rolled up, any irrigation pipe is removed and the section is tilled under. Several weeks later, after crop residue is broken down, we plant the next crop.

Our berries are marketed through our Farmer's markets, CSA and wholesale accounts. We also freeze any extra we may have for winter sales. Our prices are usually \$5 a pint, 2 for \$9, or \$40 for a flat of 12. Wholesale prices usually work out to be around \$30-36 a flat.

We have been very happy with our success with the annual bed system. It supplies us a consistent supply of beautiful, flavorful berries starting at least a week before conventionally grown matted row berries start producing. Our yields are usually averaging 12-16,000 lbs per acre or between \$50-70 K per acre gross.