Day Neutral Strawberry Fertility and Crop Management
Guidelines for Northeast Growers

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There are two opportunities for planting Day Neutral (DN) strawberries – spring planting of fall-dug dormant plants, or late summer planting of plugs. Spring planting remains a priority for many growers as it allows them to take advantage of spring soil moisture. Growers use DN varieties to augment June bearers – primarily to follow the larger matted row production, but also to provide early production the second year.

Pre-plant soil test and site prep should focus on Phosphorus levels. Additionally growers should add 50 lb actual N/acre pre-plant during bed formation usually as a granular blend along with the required P and K. Some growers are prepping fields in the fall to help them get access to fields as soon as possible in the spring. This would mean that some compensation for pre-plant N might be needed. Deer and other critters can also do a number on the plastic mulch, but in many areas it might be worth doing this early especially as they predominately plant the berries by hand. DN strawberries perform best when planted on plastic mulch covered raised beds.

In the spring, flower trusses are removed until the plant reaches a reasonable plant size - 6-8 healthy leaves per crown – which usually translates into sending a crew through twice.

Beginning at heavy bloom to green fruit, soluble fertilizers should be fed through the drip irrigation system at a rate of 3-5 lb actual N/acre/week. Initially the rate starts at 3#, and then it gradually increases until harvest begins. When harvest kicks in, the weekly N rate may actually go up to 7# N/acre/week, or 1# each day.

Alternating weekly fertilizer source between calcium nitrate (CaNO3) and a greenhouse grade potassium nitrate (KNO3, 13-0-44) to provide necessary calcium and potassium along with nitrogen. Recommended K rate is 15 lb/week. CaNO3 a safe Ca source from a root perspective. Urea can also be used as a N source and later in the season it might be more important as it is less expensive.

Boron is not specifically used, despite the fact that the literature indicates it is very important and most soils in the east are deficient. Many growers are very interested in using foliar nutrients, but the return on investment remains unclear.

DN plantings are mostly annual crops but some growers are holding over the planting for a second season with mixed results. Seascape overwinters well but Albion is quite tricky under northern conditions. The typical overwintering method for Canadian growers is one layer of heavy weight row cover (40 to 50 ml vs. standard 19 ml) with no straw. The heavy cover is more durable, and it lasts at least two years. New York growers still depend on straw.

Most DN fruit is being sold at retail farm stands so yield is important but not as critical as it is for wholesalers as retail growers are receiving a premium price and also need very high quality. The most popular variety is Albion, with a lot of Seascape and San Andreas. San Andreas seems to overwinter better than Albion and has good fruit size, but the first picking may be later than Albion.