

April 7, 2000

Strawberry Information**NC Strawberry Update - April 7, 2000**

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General Roundup - NC strawberry growers were generally unaffected by the cold front that came into the state Tuesday/Wednesday with only isolated frosts reported in mountains at higher elevations. We have been dealing with very windy conditions, with the exception of this morning (Friday). Hopefully most growers are taking advantage of the calm conditions this morning to catch up on field spraying. Unfortunately, the winds will be back this afternoon and it would appear that we will have difficult spraying conditions through much of the week ahead (for Clayton, Central Crops):

<----- 1-7 DAY FORECAST -----> <8-10 DAY OUTLOOK>

DATE Apr 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

DAY FRI SAT SUN MON TUE WED THU FRI SAT SUN

MAX AIR TEMP (F) 83 77 56 71 67 65 62 69 71 72

MIN AIR TEMP (F) 57 50 41 33 46 46 42 47 46 46

PRECIP PROB (%) 18 52 31 6 38 41 26 41 33 25

AVG DAILY RH (%) 55 60 55 46 69 69 68 65 63 61

AVG WND SPD (mph) 10 16 18 9 7 10 9 9 8 8

Note the possibility for colder temperatures on Sunday/Monday (low of 33 for Clayton, Mon. morning).

We will keep you advised.

Crop size and N fertility - I am seeing a number of petiole nitrate reports where the levels during full bloom were running quite high this year (>4000 ppm) as opposed to last spring when plants in these same fields never went higher than 3000 ppm. There is also a difference in crop load this year - sometimes we are seeing as few as 20-30 blooms and green fruits per plant vs. 60 or more last year. I would recommend that growers carefully assess their crop load potential, and if it appears to be significantly lower, consider a reduced N fertility program through the drip. For example, a Chandler plant with only 25 good quality flowers and green fruits per plant (< 1 lb fruit per plant potential) will have a lower N demand than a plant with 60 or more quality flowers and green stage fruits. In a number of locations I have noticed some very dark green, lush looking plants (not good) and relatively light crop loads. In some instances the plants are even forming some runners (not a good sign). The small plant size is mostly related to the problems created by Hurricane Floyd (delayed planting dates, wet soils for fumigation, or no fumigation). Even in a normal crop year many growers will start reducing their N fertility to 0.5 lb/day/acre as picking begins. Too much N fertility leads to very soft berries with poor flavor. Consequently, I would advise that if the flower and fruit counts are substantially down, it would be prudent to consider a reduced, not an increased, N fertility program. At this late stage you cannot "add back" flowers

with an aggressive N fertility program - it will only cause plants to become more lush and force more early season runnering.

Onslow County Report - Jeff Morton

A grower that grew his own tips last fall and got most of them set by the third week in October had good growth this winter and opened to the public on his Sweet Charlies last Friday, March 31 and even picked a few himself for some friends/neighbors on March 27/28. The plants have a very heavy fruit set as do the Chandlers, but the latter are still a couple of weeks out yet. They have a few ripe berries on them now. I don't believe that anyone has ever opened this early in this area before. He has a few rows of Sweet Charlies that he was not able to set out until two weeks later than the bulk of the crop. Those rows have only half the growth and a fourth the number of fruit.

Question from Johnston County - Jay Darden, Asst. Agricultural Agent

I was out at a local farmers yesterday and he was asking about the 12-18" runner that were running from the plants. In my opinion his fruit set is not very good this year. He mentioned that he has never had this before, usually this does not happen until late in the season. Also, I am working with a young new grower (1-2 acres) that planted his plants on November 9 without methyl Bromide. I was called in after all of this. I have made almost weekly visits and the fellow is very receptive to recommendations and good cultural management. The bottom line is that his yield is not going to be great, but his plants are growing fast and crowns are still growing. Is there any "season extenders" that this fellow could try, or do the high temperatures just shut things down? Thanks for your assistance!

Response: this is a very common situation through the upper coastal plain and piedmont counties (more of a problem the further west and north we go in the state). Seeing runners this early is definitely not a good sign and it is an indicator of a reduced crop load. We may get a break on temperatures - mild conditions such as we have experienced are very favorable for getting every last flower to produce a marketable berry. When temperatures get into the low 80's the strawberry plant will shift gears into a more vegetative mode. Everything is basically controlled by temperature at this stage. And, trying to add more N to compensate for this reduced crop load will only serve to lower fruit quality. The good news is that the crop we are seeing in spring 2000 is very good quality, and growers need to consider a price increase over last year.

Barclay Poling
Extension Small Fruit Specialist
NCCES

Contributed by:

E. Barclay Poling, Director
SRSFC
Campus Box 7533, 1017 Main Campus Dr., Suite 1100
Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7553
919.515.5365

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barclay_poling@ncsu.edu

The Southern Region Small Fruit Consortium

Campus Box 7533

1017 Main Campus Drive / Suite 1100

NCSU Centennial Campus

Raleigh, North Carolina 27695-7553

919.515.5365