

Row Covers

Strawberries and Row Covers

Strawberries like a well-drained, reasonably fertile soil with a pH of 6.0-6.5. They are grown in a variety of climates and soil conditions around the world, with farmers manipulating the growing conditions (with fertilizer, irrigation, protection from weather, etc.) to get as close to ideal growing conditions as they can. Farmers can use row covers for frost protection and often use them in unison with an overhead sprinkler system. Row covers are a light-weight cloth made of polypropylene or polyester and laid floating on top of the growing strawberry plants for frost protection. Farmers can also use row covers to encourage plants to grow before they go dormant. Row covers are helpful, but are very labor intensive. It takes four people about 1.5 hours to pull row covers over 1 acre of strawberries. The labor and time it takes to use row covers is significantly more than if you use overhead irrigation. With overhead irrigation a lever or button is used to turn on the system and is checked periodically throughout the night.

Farmers can use row covers to encourage plants to grow before they go dormant, or stop actively growing, in December. Bags of rocks are used to hold the covers in place.



Young Strawberry Plants and Row Covers

Strawberry plants are dormant, or not actively growing, from December through February. Row covers can be used by farmers in the fall to encourage plants to grow larger before dormancy. When plants begin growing in spring, they will be closer to being ready to produce strawberries.

Dormant Plants and Row Covers

Dormant plants are not usually affected by extreme temperatures because there are few blooms. However, if temperatures drop below 15 degrees Fahrenheit, plants crowns can be damaged. Row covers can be used for this but not all growers protect at this stage. Snowfall and freezing rain do not affect strawberry plants in the dormant stage (after all, frost protection with irrigation creates ice), and snow provides a protective blanket. These precipitation events usually do not occur at the times of critical temperatures and growth stage.

Flowers and Frost Protection

Every pollinated flower will produce a strawberry. If there is a late frost, blooms can be damaged or killed. This would result in a lower yield (less strawberries to pick) and more deformed fruit that can't be sold to consumers. Row covers are one way farmers can protect blooms from freezing temperatures.

Credits

https://www.ncfb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Book_From-Farm-to-School-Crops-of-NC_-_A-Visit-to-the-Strawberry-Patch-.pdf Book Link - photos/text features and some information taken from this book