

WEED MANAGEMENT IN MATTED ROW STRAWBERRY



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Weed control is probably the single most important factor determining longevity of matted row strawberry plantings in the northeast. It is critical for growers to successfully manage weeds in spite of limited herbicide availability and the high cost for hand weeding. A truly integrated approach to weed control is needed including chemical control, hand weeding, and cultural practices to successfully control weeds.

Chemical control is most appropriate at renovation and during strawberry dormancy in the fall or early spring. By late spring chemical control in strawberries is limited to grass control and to new, non-bearing plantings due to days-to-harvest restrictions and phytotoxicity to actively growing strawberry plants. Sethoxydim (Poast) can be applied for control of grasses less than 6 inches tall and actively growing up until the 7 days to harvest.

For new fields, the elimination of perennial weeds before planting with cultivation and a broad-spectrum herbicide such as glyphosate (RoundUp) is important for good stand establishment. Also an application of a preemergent herbicide such as napropamide (Devrinol) should give good control of germinating seeds for the first 4-8 weeks. As the residual activity of this herbicide disappears, cultivation becomes the main option until dormancy in late fall. Sinbar was recently granted a supplemental label on first year strawberries for control of annual grasses and broadleaf weeds. Sinbar should be applied at 2-3 oz per acre after transplanting but before new runner plants start to root. If strawberry plants are allowed to develop new foliage prior to Sinbar application, the application ***must*** be followed immediately by 0.5 to 1 inch of irrigation or rainfall to wash the Sinbar off the strawberry foliage.

Finger weeders, flex tine cultivators, and rolling cultivators can provide good weed control in new plantings and also help set runners into the row. A grass herbicide such as sethoxydim (Poast) can provide control of actively growing grasses only and may be appropriate for specific weed problems.

Hand weeding is important in late spring to clean up any weeds missed by fall and early spring herbicide treatments. Several weeds can be established and flowering by late spring leading to summer weed problems. Dandelions, field pansy (Johnny-jump-ups), and groundsel can all be flowering and distributing seeds widely at this time. These weeds can develop seeds from open flowers even after pulling or cultivation so the plants need to be removed from the field to eliminate the seeds. Field bindweed is also emerging at this time and needs to be nipped in the bud before it gets out of hand.

Cultural practices such as mowing border areas and clearing fence rows is important to avoid new weed seeds blowing into fields. Additional straw mulch can also be added to thin areas in fields to keep weed seeds from germinating while also maintaining soil moisture and keeping soil away from developing berries. Managing weed pests through an integrated program of chemical control, good cultural practices, and vigilant hand weeding can help ensure the vigorous establishment of new plantings and a long life for matted row strawberry fields in the northeast.

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