

Ten Keys for Higher Sugarbeet Quality (Tip #2)

Early planting is one of the ten key components to improve sugarbeet quality.

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Taking advantage of early planting opportunities can pay good dividends when it comes to improving both yield and quality. Planting date changes the length of the growing season and allows the sugarbeet to capture more sunlight that is converted and stored as sugar. Under ideal situations we would want our sugarbeets to be canopied by June 20th, the longest day of the year. Early planting will maximize the amount of sunlight captured by the leaves and minimizes the amount of sunlight wasted hitting bare ground. Early planting also will bolster tonnage and greatly improve recoverable white sugar per acre (RWSA).

Research conducted by Michigan Sugar Company comparing four planting dates at two week intervals resulted in a 2.1 percentage point reduction of sucrose from earliest to latest planting date. Starting with the earliest planting date in mid-April the pounds of recoverable white sugar per ton (RWST) were: 237, 232, 219, and 197, respectively.

The 2012 sugarbeet growing season for the Great Lakes Area is on the record books for the highest tonnage and sugar content. Over 70 percent of the acres were planted in March. Growers took advantage of early planting due to unseasonably warm conditions. Sugarbeet seedlings are somewhat tolerant to light frost and cold conditions. Priming of sugarbeet seed has also enhanced speed of emergence under cold conditions and improved final stands.

Michigan State University Extension Sugarbeet Advancement program strongly recommends growers take advantage of any early planting opportunities. The 2012 season was unusual, but we have often seen in past growing seasons a one to three day window of opportunity early in the season. However, soil planting conditions must be right. Advantages to early planting can be lost if ground is too wet when planting and soil structure is compromised. Mudding beets in the ground in the spring often leads to soil compaction, crusting and/or reduce stands.