



Tops on Preferred to Tops Off When it Comes to Sugarbeet Freeze Protection

When freezing temperatures threaten at sugarbeet harvest time be sure that beet canopies are left intact and not defoliated.

This year, thousands of tons of beets have been reportedly abandoned in the western states due to very low temperatures and multiple freezing events. Both frozen and freeze injured beets that are put into long term storage piles will not store properly. Even a small quantity of frozen/freeze injured beets put into a pile can cause a hot spot of deterioration to develop and jeopardize surrounding beets. We are now into the November harvest and the chances of sub-freezing temperatures are increasing.

Michigan is very fortunate that the Great Lakes help moderate our fall temperatures. This allows us to extend our harvest season significantly longer than many other continental growing regions. However, we are not immune from freeze events and growers need to be aware when those are predicted. Foliage of the sugarbeets can help protect the beet crown from freezing. Michigan Sugar Company and Michigan State University Extension observations confirm that heavy foliage will help keep the beets insulated and reduce freeze injury. **Do not** leave defoliated unharvest beets during a frost/freeze event.

Be aware that every frost/freeze event varies in temperature and duration. The impact of the event can also depend on elevation and proximity to the Great Lakes. When an event occurs it may take Ag staff some time to evaluate the impact and overall occurrence. If crowns are frozen they will appear yellowish/translucent when cut with a beet knife. Depending on the intensity of the frost/freeze, harvest will be delayed generally from a few hours up to three days when injury is more severe. Longer delays can allow beets to “heal”. On projected frost/freeze nights, make sure that defoliation is not done too far ahead of harvest. Should a breakdown occur that does not allow topped beets to be harvested, contact your agriculturalist for the handling procedure.

REACH Research Contacts

Steve Poindexter, MSU Senior Extension Education, (989) 798-5848

Jim Stewart, MSC Director of Research, (989) 225-6720

Greg Clark, MSC Agronomist, (989) 891-6785

Lee Hubbell, MSC Research Agronomist, (989) 225-6708

	<p>Research & Education Advisory Council (REACH) c/o MICHIGAN SUGAR COMPANY 2600 South Euclid Avenue Bay City, Michigan 48706 (989) 686-0161</p>
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