



Tips for Managing Unharvested Sugarbeets in Preparation for the 2015 Crop Year

When destroying unharvested sugarbeets make sure roots are cut up and mixed with soil for the most rapid decomposition.

The Michigan/Ontario sugarbeet growing area is on track for producing the largest sugarbeet crop in history. With an abundance of rainfall, favorable weather conditions and excellent grower management, a record yield is projected. Because of limited processing capacity in the Michigan Sugar Company factories, growers are submitting offers for payment on limited acres for crop destruction. This is the most viable alternative to help prevent haul back of sugarbeets to the fields if they are unable to be processed by spring.

The sugarbeet roots of a 30 ton beet crop left in the field may contain up to 120 pounds of nitrogen, 29 pounds of P₂O₅ and 99 pounds of K₂O. This does not necessarily mean it is all available for the following 2015 crop. Each ton of roots and tops can tie-up an estimated 2-5 pounds of nitrogen in the soil until decomposition is complete. Sugarbeet tops break down rapidly, however organic breakdown and nitrogen release from the roots may take one or more seasons. To speed up decomposition: disk/chisel, disk-rip or combinations that cut up beets in small pieces is most desirable. Under Michigan's variable winter conditions, beets left untouched in the fall may or may not completely freeze out and die.

Reports from sources in the Red River Valley and previous Michigan State University Extension experience indicate that soybeans may be the most desirable crop to follow destroyed sugarbeets. Soybeans following beets do not require any special management. Corn however may require an additional 30-50 pounds of nitrogen/acre above normal recommendations. This can help overcome nitrogen tie-up from decomposing residue. Corn may also exhibit Corn Following Sugarbeet Syndrome (CFS); symptoms are stunted, purpling corn with reduced vigor. CFS syndrome can be minimized with hybrid selection and 2x2 placement of P₂O₅ and zinc at planting.

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