



Agriculture & Horticulture
DEVELOPMENT BOARD



New Project

SF 128a

To assess the performance of new June-bearing strawberry varieties and advanced selections in a commercial UK substrate production system over two harvest periods

Project Number:	SF 128a
Project Title:	To assess the performance of new June-bearing strawberry varieties and advanced selections in a commercial UK substrate production system over two harvest periods
Project Leader:	Sarah Troop
Contractor:	Meiosis Ltd
Industry Representative:	Stephen McGuffie, New Farm Produce
Start Date:	01 March 2013
End Date:	30 September 2015
Project Cost (total project cost):	£26,290

Project Summary:

The project is designed to bring together, in an independent variety trial for comparison purposes, the most interesting new June-bearer strawberry varieties and advanced selections from UK and overseas breeding programmes in order to assess their performance when grown under the same conditions on a commercial site in a central location in the UK.

The growing system for this comparison will be protected substrate production representative of the standard industry best practice. The entries will be of one plant type, namely tray plants, of a consistent size and quality. Elsanta, the industry standard for substrate culture, will be included in the project for comparison purposes.

The replicated trial will be planted in early spring 2014 and cropped over a two-year period with fruit yield, fruit quality, shelf life, seasonality, plant habit and disease/pest susceptibility recorded to determine whether any of the entries may offer UK growers an advantage over the current industry standard. The results will, however, be useful to both annual and double cropping growers. Retailers will also be invited to sample the fruit and give their opinion of the market suitability of each variety included in the project.

Aims & Objectives:

(i) Project aim(s):

To identify and fruit on one site new strawberry varieties and near-market selections to assess their potential for profitable commercial production in protected substrate culture.

(ii) Project objective(s):

The initial five specific objectives are to independently compare and evaluate new varieties and advanced selections against the industry standard for substrate culture looking at the following characteristics:

- Fruit Yield
- Fruit Quality
- Shelf life
- Pest and disease susceptibility
- Plant habit

The sixth objective is to communicate the findings to the industry in the most effective ways.

Benefits to industry

The industry will benefit from the project by learning whether there are new varieties and/or advanced selections that can be shown under UK conditions to produce improved profitability through higher class 1 yields, better fruit size and quality, enhanced shelf life, season extension and/or better disease/pest tolerances than the existing varieties currently grown in the UK.

A variety or selection that shows promise will be highlighted to the industry, which should encourage uptake by propagators, growers and retailers. Through open days in the first and second fruiting seasons growers will be able to see the plants and assess the growing habit and fruit quality for themselves. Grower feedback from these open days will be incorporated into the overall assessment of a variety. The first and second year yields, in comparison with Elsanta, will be reported in the final project report, through fact sheets produced at the end of each season and by an article in the HDC News at the end of the project.

Growing newly released varieties can be a challenge for growers as there is usually little agronomic information available about a new variety, therefore demonstrating that a new variety can be grown successfully in a commercial UK substrate system would reduce the risk a grower takes when deciding to grow a new variety for the first time. It will also serve to increase the opportunity a grower has to select a variety that best suits their growing conditions and market outlets.

By including in the project only those varieties and selections that are near-market or newly released, the industry can make use of the project results immediately as it is expected that plants will be readily available albeit in small quantities by the end of the project.

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