



SEVEN TIPS TO INCORPORATE A NEW PRODUCT INTO A GROWING PROGRAM

By Tatiana Giacinti, Product Manager

Every young-plant grower and producer wants to harvest the highest quality plants in the shortest crop time. Along with this shared goal comes a shared fear: raising plants that don't reach their maximum potential. And often, young-plant growers and producers run into the same problem: their crops reach a plateau in quality and crop time. They may attempt to alter the environment (adjust the air or temperature) or make changes in plant fertility and genetics, but ultimately these changes do little to improve crop quality and reduce crop time.

Adding or removing products in the growing program can make a big impact, but at Kemin Crop Technologies, we often meet growers and producers who are reluctant to do so. Product changes take time and effort. Growers and producers have to research each product, conduct trials and design an effective production system. But without regularly evaluating the products and procedures in a growing program, how can one know what is and isn't performing well?

We know growers and producers are already busy, and that's why Kemin Crop Technologies wants to give you simple but effective ways to evaluate and implement new products into your growing practices. Our expert gave us his best tips for incorporating a new product into a growing system.

EXPERT TIPS

➔ TIP#1 Determine what you want to achieve



First things first: You need to ask yourself some questions to determine what you want your production system to achieve. Some good queries to evaluate where your production system is at and where you want it to be are: What are the challenges I run into with my current program? How well is the current production system working? Are the crops I am growing static or falling behind others? Do my crops share common growing media and fertility programs?

➔ TIP#2 Decide what you will change in your growing system



A growing system has two basic criteria to consider: growing media and its fertility. The interaction of these two plays an important role in crop quality improvement and reduced growing time.

To serve an operation's needs, a good growing media mix should provide an anchor point for plant's roots, hold water and nutrients efficiently, deliver nutrients to plants and help drain water to prevent overwatering. It's important growers and producers assess the growing media they're currently using to understand the components in its formulation, the biological additives for optimal fertility and its physical properties.

➔ TIP#3 Develop metrics



Once you have chosen a product, define the metrics you'll use to indicate if the implement is successful. Some possible areas of measurement include: Overall growth increase in height, width, branching and/or flower development; rooting; crop time; and disease/insects. When you're testing a change in your production system, always keep a traditionally grown, untreated control group in the same area as the treated test plants. Both groups should be evaluated on the same metrics for comparison. Kemin Crop Technologies also highly recommends only changing one aspect of your current program at a time when conducting small-batch trials. This allows for proper evaluation of the changed component's performance.

➔ TIP#4 Do your research



Results, timing and necessary equipment are crucial considerations when evaluating a growing program. When you add a new product to your growing program, you should already have an idea of what the result will be.

Ask the product manufacturer about its mode of action and anticipated effect on plants. Based on your anticipated results and using your current cropping schedule, set a timeline for an expected completion date. And, although it may seem obvious now, don't forget to check that you have all the equipment necessary to properly use the product in your operation.

➔ TIP#5 Test, monitor and record



Take weekly measurements of your selected metrics. We suggest having an impartial greenhouse staff member collect the data, along with some photos. The measurements must be recorded and saved without interference so they can be accurately used for evaluation and comparison.

➔ TIP#6 Evaluate the change agent



When determining if a product is an ideal candidate to improve your growing system, use data, special equipment and product specification as part of your criteria:

Data: Does the collected data indicate successful implementation based on the metrics you chose for observation?

Special equipment: What equipment is needed to use the product, and what is the price tag on it (and the cost of labor, if applicable)? Does a growing media manufacturer already incorporate it into their final product? What is the cost of the equipment (and labor needed)? Can it be pre-incorporated into my media by a growing media manufacturer?

Product specification: What is the product's shelf life, package size, price and return on investment?

➔ TIP#7 Repeat and verify the trial



Consider repeating the trial to confirm the initial results before implementing a new procedure or product into your production system.



source: TD-17-01410 - BR-2018-00080

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CROPTECH@KEMIN.COM

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