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YEARBOOK & BUYERS GUIDE

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Edition



A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH!

Issues such as the loss of active ingredients and insect resistance to pesticides has spurred the berry sector into taking a more holistic approach to protecting its crops. This new approach is being made easier by the many crop nutrition and biopesticide products that are now available to growers. *Rachel Anderson reports.*

Crop resilience

In 2019, Dr Avice Hall MBE of the University of Hertfordshire's Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences announced some of the many benefits of silicon that she and her team have discovered following a decade of research. Whilst silicon is the second most abundant element on the planet, most of it is not available for plant uptake – which is why plants benefit from its bio-available form as a nutrient. Happily, trials carried out on a commercial strawberry farm for five consecutive years showed that silicon reduced the strawberry plants' susceptibility to strawberry powdery mildew. Furthermore, an inadvertent discovery of the research, which has been supported by AHDB Horticulture and Orion Future Technology, was that silicon application also helped to reduce the

number of two-spotted spider mites. This was possibly because the silicon made the plants' phytoliths too crunchy for the mites. Moreover, an experiment carried out on campus in hydroponically-grown strawberry plants found evidence that silicon offers many other advantages to the crop, including:

- increased biomass
- increased number of runners
- early flowering
- increased chlorophyll
- increased Brix
- increased yield

Mike Stoker, technical manager for Engage Agro-Europe, notes that the firm handily offers the soft-fruit industry a silicon range of fertilisers that bring an innovative new silicon technology to professional growing. "Tetra Ethyl Silicate is a nutrient solution containing a unique form of silicon which is proven to be available to the plant via both foliar and root application." The range includes the product Sion, which helps reinforce the crops' leaf cuticles and other epidermal tissues to protect plants from pathogenic and pest pressure. Sion can be applied on soft fruit crops as part of



Research by the University of Hertfordshire has shown that application of silicon reduces strawberry plants' susceptibility to strawberry powdery mildew.



a regular programme at a rate of 0.25-0.5 litres/hectare. Similarly, Sentinel is a

crops in what the firm describes as "the NatuGro triangle." The objective

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