Forced Air Cooling Field Trial Results

Blueberries

A precooling experiment was conducted to test the performance of a small scale (countertop sized) forced air cooler (FAC) in parallel with product cooled by room cooling. Freshly harvested blueberries (28 lbs) were placed in a walk-in cooler set at 40 °F. In the case of room cooling the product temperature is reduced as a result of simply being in the room with cool air circulating around it. The same mass of product was placed in a small forced air cooler (FAC) that included a base, frame, suction fan, plenum, and plastic tarp with one end open to direct the cold room air over the product packed inside the crates. The ambient temperature of the cooler and the pulp temperature of the produce cooled using each method was monitored over time to determine and compare the precooling rate. The product started at 83 °F and, over the course of an hour, dropped 9 °F by room cooling and 30 °F by forced air cooling.

Cooler Set point (°F) 40		
Blueberries (27.7 lbs)	Room Cooled	Forced Air Cooled
Starting Temp (°F)	82	84
Temp @ 20min (°F)	81	73
Temp @ 60min (°F)	73	54
Temp @ Test End [1hr 40min], (°F)	65	45
Observed Cooling Rate (°F/min)	0.18	0.39
Time to 7/8 Temp (Hours)	6.9	1.8
FAC / RC Rate Ratio ("FAC is ___ times faster")		**2.2**

A standard measure of precooling rate is the time required to bring the product down ⅞ of the way to the target storage temperature. This is called "⅞ time". Based on this test, when starting at 83 °F, it was estimated that the ⅞ time for forced air cooling was 1.8 hours (actual) and for room cooling it was 6.9 hours (estimated). **These results show that it takes 3.8 times longer to room cool watermelon when compared to FAC (or FAC is 2.2 times faster).**

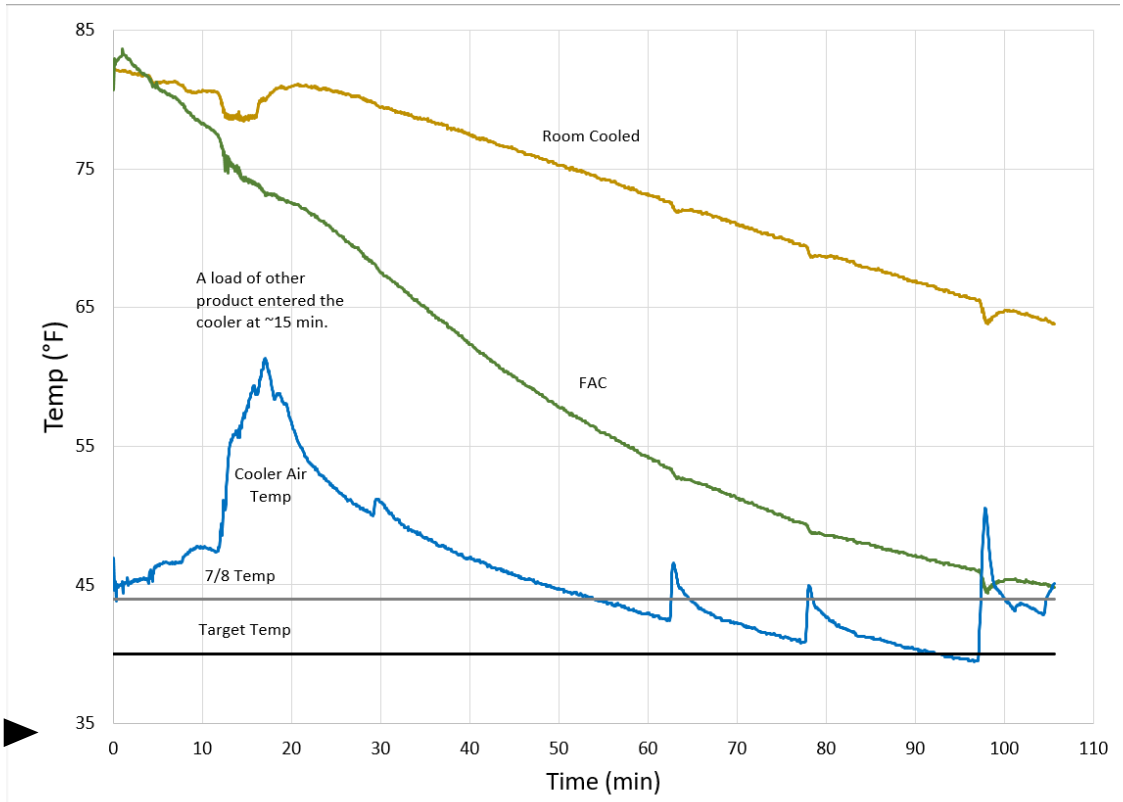

Figure - Comparison of blueberries cooled using room cooling and forced air cooling methods.

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