

FORCED AIR COOLING FIELD TRIAL RESULTS

Strawberries



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 strawberries (19 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 70 °F and, over the course of an hour, dropped 11 °F by room cooling and 22 °F by forced air cooling.

A standard measure of precooling rate is the time required to bring the product down 7/8 of the way to the target storage temperature. This is called "7/8 time". Based on this test, when starting at 70 °F, it was estimated that the 7/8 time for forced air cooling was 1.5 hours (actual) and for room cooling it was 5 hours (estimated). **These results show that it takes 3.3 times longer to room cool watermelon when compared to FAC (or FAC is 1.3 times faster).**

Acknowledgments

Funding for this publication was made possible, in part, by USDA NE SARE under grant #LNE16-347. Thanks to Adam's Berry Farm for participation in this trial.

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



Cooler Set point (°F) 40	Room Cooled	Forced Air Cooled
Strawberries (18.7 lbs)		
Starting Temp (°F)	72	68
Temp @ 20min (°F)	70	59
Temp @ 60min (°F)	61	46
Temp @ Test End [1hr 40min], (°F)	54	44
Observed Cooling Rate (°F/min)	0.18	0.24
Time to 7/8 Temp (Hours)	5.0	1.5
FAC / RC Rate Ratio ("FAC is ___ times faster")		1.3

