

For Altman Plants, Higher Inclusion Rates Have Become Gold Standard

Giddings, Texas



HydraFiber
Engineered Media



TESTIMONIAL

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- Jeff Murphy, Operations Manager, Altman Plants

Surviving another busy spring often comes with a sigh of relief for most growers. But for those who understand the importance of staying ahead of the curve, that sigh only lasts for a moment. The time between busy seasons provides an opportunity to start innovating. For Jeff Murphy, operations manager of production and maintenance at the Altman Plants facility in Giddings, Texas, the 2021 fall mum production season offered an opportunity to innovate with higher HydraFiber® inclusion rates.

Since 2019, Altman Plants has been growing in 50 percent HydraFiber and 50 percent peat. During spring production in 2021, Altman Plants struggled to source peat, leading them to increase the amount of HydraFiber in their mixes to 60 percent HydraFiber and 40 percent peat. Since then, the company hasn't looked back.

"The only raw material we've not had a hard time getting is HydraFiber, and because we know we can get it 365 days a year, we want to take advantage of that with higher inclusion rates," Murphy said. "Since raising our inclusion rates, we've had no issues with the quality of our plants. Mums are very forgiving so it's the ideal crop to try at higher HydraFiber inclusion rates."

When moving to higher inclusion rates, growers need to consider a few important changes that can help provide for a smooth transition. First, higher inclusion rates will require a change in lime rate to maintain ideal media pH. HydraFiber's recommendation is for every 10% replacement of peat with HydraFiber, the lime rate should be reduced by 10%.

"That rule of thumb has been working out great for us," Murphy said. "We're always evaluating to see if the pH is on the high or low side, but by doing the 10 up/10 down rule, we haven't been burned or lost any plants."

FOR EVERY 10% PEAT WE REMOVED AND REPLACE WITH WOOD, LIME SHOULD BE REDUCED ~10%

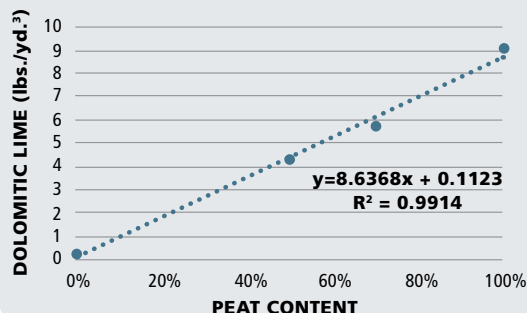
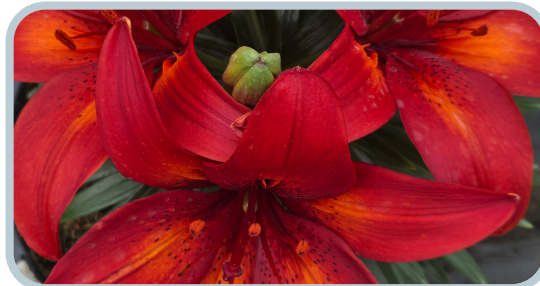


Chart shows correlation between recommended lime rate relative to % of peat in mix

In addition to changing lime rates, growers will also need to consider making adjustments to their pot filling equipment. "Know that the higher the inclusion rate of HydraFiber, the more likely you can expect bridging in your hoppers," said Daniel Norden, senior R&D and technical manager for Profile Products. "You will want to make sure you have some extra hands on deck to help with filling; and pot size needs to be increased as HydraFiber rates approach 50% inclusion."



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optimize



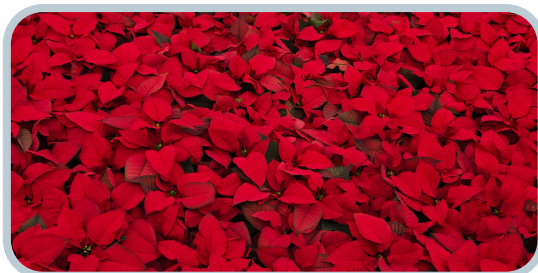
NOT USING HYDRAFIBER? HERE'S MURPHY'S TAKE:

- Don't be scared. Just do it. We haven't found a crop yet that doesn't like growing in HydraFiber.
- Growing in wood is not new. What is new is that HydraFiber is not like other wood products. It truly is a gamechanger because it takes an all-natural product and makes it a professional grade, engineered substrate that I can rely on day-in and day-out.
- You'll have support. The HydraFiber and AdeptAg teams are just a phone call or plane ride away. They are the most reliable suppliers we've worked with — they're invested in making your transition a smooth one.

MAKING THE RIGHT ADJUSTMENTS

While working through filling, Murphy's team asked themselves several questions that helped them make the right adjustments, including:

- How am I dropping my soil out of the hopper? Is it all in the center or across the pack?
- How are my guides positioned? Do they need to be closer or further apart?
- Can I do anything different with my rollers or compactors to get better results?
- How does my gate height impact the soil drop? Do I need to lower or raise my belts? Would speeding up the belts or slowing them down help get better results?
- Do I need extra agitation like the AdeptAg soil conditioner, or do I take those helicopter paddles out of the corner, wipe off the dust and use those to help spread and drive soil into the cells?
- Do I have the right moisture to make sure soil falls properly into the pots? Note: as inclusion rates increase, proper fill is more easily attained by reducing moisture slightly.



"I think a lot of the people in our industry have become complacent and they don't want to work through hard problems or give up at first sight," Murphy said. "Rather than giving up and saying, 'I can't fill with this,' I challenge growers to figure out why. Ask yourself these questions."

Starting the higher inclusion rate process with your HydraFiber processing equipment can be effectively done in consultation with a HydraFiber technical representative. This tech sheet on calculating the amount of HydraFiber also outlines the process step-by-step. Murphy uses HydraFiber's Ultra 160WB 50-pound bales with the HydraFiber Processing Unit (HPU) at his facilities. Using this method, he's been able to ensure the new inclusion rates are right where they need to be.

"We have our guidelines written in permanent black marker right on our machine so that we can see very quickly how much HydraFiber we are putting in. We know how many feet we need to be moving to feed 50, 60 or 70 percent," Murphy said. "Then, since I know I will be using more materials, I call my HydraFiber rep and ask them to ship another truckload. My order shows up as scheduled and I've never run out of HydraFiber, even since making the switch to higher inclusion rates."

"If you haven't started using HydraFiber yet, you're already several years behind the times. Just do it."

- Jeff Murphy

We need to always be looking for ways to improve and to make things better," he said. "Being able to understand how to pivot and flex when there is another major shortage of raw materials is extremely important and now is the time for us to test the waters. If you haven't started using HydraFiber yet, you're already several years behind the times. Just do it."

If you're a grower or blender interested in learning more and starting HydraFiber trials, visit HydraFiber.com or reach out to us at 800-496-0955 or hydrafiber@profileproducts.com.

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