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Driessen Blue Berries pleased with use of Ekote

controlled-release fertilizers in blueberry cultivation

Leon Hendrix, a cultivation specialist at Driessen Blueberries is pleased with their use of Ekote controlled-release fertilizers as an open-field basal fertilizer for blueberries. ‘This fertilizer means I don’t need to use extra water to ensure that water-soluble fertilizers are transferred to the plant during wet periods. This allows me to keep the Electro Conductivity (EC) more constant as there are fewer peaks in the application of fertilizers. This also helps better maintain the moisture balance in the ground. During wet periods, I prefer not to use extra water.’

Driessen Blueberries, located in Melderslo in Limburg, cultivates blueberries on approximately 70 hectares of open-field land. The company is at the forefront of blueberry production worldwide and continually monitors which aspects could be improved, such as the use of fertilizers. Leon Hendrix explains how Driessen Blueberries uses fertilizer and more importantly, how they use the soil.

‘In the cultivation of blueberries, fertilization by means of fertigation is still the most common practice. However, in recent years we have seen that it can be advantageous to use a controlled-release fertilizer as a basic fertilizer. During wet periods, I would prefer to not have to supply water by means of fertigation to ensure that sufficient fertilizer reaches the plant. That would be wasteful. If basic fertilizer is incorporated into the ridges, no extra water is required. The benefit of controlled-release fertilizer is that it works for a longer period of time. Depending on the crop, it may even work for up to eighteen months. The combination of these two types of fertilizer ensure that I can maintain the EC in the ground better because there are fewer or no fertilization peaks. Ekote’s controlled release ensures stable growth for the crop, which improves the quality of the fruit,’ explains Hendrix.

Driessen Blueberries B.V.

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Soil as the foundation

As is the case for any crop, the soil is vitally important. The main benefit of controlled-release fertilizers is that they do not disturb the soil life at all. The fertilizers only need moisture and the right soil temperature to work. This manner of fertilization therefore also preserves the pH levels in the soil. Arno Westhoven is the dedicated advisor for Driessen Blueberries. ‘During autumn, we take soil samples to determine the fertilization strategy for the following year,’ he explains. ‘Paying attention to the soil is essential in the long term. Each year we look at the condition of the soil and then determine the specific ratio of basic fertilization on that basis. In addition to regular fertilizers, we also apply some organic fertilization by way of compost. In addition to the fact that it is good for the soil, it also helps control weed growth and prevents the ridge from drying out.’

Application

‘Ekompany is very approachable and is open to the ideas of its clients,’ continues Hendrix. ‘As an example, last year – depending on the soil – we used two different fertilizers for blueberries. In both cases we applied complete fertilizers, meaning that they included calcium, sulphur, and boron as well as a high potassium content. The great thing is that Ekompany has the ability to separately control the release of specific nutrients. In this case, the nitrogen was released over a period of four months and the potassium was released at a slightly slower rate over a six-month period (at 21 °C soil temperature). This means that you can provide precise fertilization in line with what the crop needs. In spite of the extremely warm season, Ekote has proven to be a very reliable fertilizer. Partly because of this, we can look back on a very satisfactory period of using this controlled-release fertilizer.

Modern fertilization

In recent years, controlled-release fertilizers are increasingly used in outdoor crops and produce excellent results. In the past, this type of fertilizer was primarily known in tree nurseries and other crops grown in pots, such as blueberry cultivation. In addition to this type of fertilizers, Ekompany also offers controlled-release fertilizers for open field cultivation. This type of fertilizers only needs moisture and the right soil temperature to be activated.

‘The most significant characteristic of these open-field fertilizers is that they are comprised of a coated or controlled-release part and an uncoated part that contains nutrients that are directly available to the plant,’ says Jo Slijpen. ‘The coated fertilizers are encased in a wafer-thin layer or coating. Once in the ground, the coating attracts moisture, which starts the process of releasing the nutrients to the plant’s root system. The thickness of the coating determines the length of the period during which the nutrients are released. How quickly the nutrients are released depends on the soil temperature. The warmer it is, the quicker the nutrients are released, in line with the plants’ increased growth during warm weather. Furthermore, the coating also offers protection against extreme weather. During heavy rainfall, the fertilizer will not wash away and during extremely dry weather, it will not evaporate,’ explains Slijpen.

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