

Plants 'abuse' holes

This year more and bigger holes in the film for excess water to drain faster.

A number of users of maize under film are concerned about the large number of plants finding their way through the holes. Normally, the plants stay under the film for about eight weeks.

According to Agricultural consultant Hein-Willem Leraar, normally some 5-10% of the plants come through the holes." In practise this year it has been regularly some 30 to 35%" he says.

This year, according to Leraar, a number of oblong holes were put in the film in the middle lane to enable the faster drainage of water. This way the so called 'bath shape'effect is avoided. "To ensure the number of holes were equal over the total surface area, the number of holes on the sides were reduced from 36 to 28 and also slightly enlarged." Despite the reduced number, plants seem to be smart" and according to the consultant 'abuse' the larger holes in search of optimum freedom.

Night frost damage

"Next season, to reduce the risk of night frost damage, we will be returning to the 36 smaller holes. Fortunately there has been no damage from frost this year despite the larger number of plants that produced through the film. But that could have been different. Remember the night of 4/5 May" he says, when it froze a few degrees above the ground.

An important function of the holes on the sides remains the removal of excess heat. The temperature under the film can quickly rise to 40 degrees Celsius and the risks of combustion would be huge without the holes.

To be able to assess how many plants come through the holes, according to Leeraar, you need to look 'crossways' along the lanes of film and not length ways. "This way you look over the empty spaces and it appears that everything grows through. Just walking along and counting is the most efficient method. There are some eight plants per meter."

The Irish manufacturer of maize film, Samco, proposed some 1,100 hectare for use. That was the maximum available for The Netherlands given that the other parts of Europe are also expanding. Last year some 700 hectare was under film in The Netherlands. The maize under film system came to The Netherlands three years ago and grew from approx. 25 to 85 hectare then 700 to its present 1,100 hectares. The three year long test period was part of a test project and this is now finished.

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