

Why You Should Switch To Compostable Mulch

By Nathan Savage, Sunscape Farms Rochester, NY 14625

Background

We grow 70 acres of total fresh market crops, with 25 acres on raised-bed black plastic and drip irrigation. We have been trialing different forms of degradable films and mulches for the last 10 years.

Over the years, we have been slowly switching over to degradable mulches. In 2016, we moved 95% of our plasticulture to compostable films.

Why We Switched and You Should Too!

- Limit personal stress
- Dramatic reduction in labor and labor issues
- Environmental benefits
- Freedom to double crop or cover crop
- Got rid of a job that everyone hated
- Stop compacting your soil in the fall
- Easier on equipment

Why Did We Wait to Switch?

- Efficacy of compostable mulch is finally competitive with conventional
- Cost of compostable mulch is finally competitive with conventional
- Labor used to be more plentiful and less expensive

Potential Issues with Compostable Mulch:

- You may find it difficult to lay with older plastic laying equipment
- It is typically not OMRI listed (for organic growers)
- Possible herbicide or other chemical response if you are spraying over the top of rows
- Possible weed issues (thistle, sedges and grasses)
- Possible increased wildlife damage in specific areas

Cost Estimates and Analysis

Note that this is based on our volume and your cost may differ based on your supplier and volume.

Plastic Type	Cost Per Linear Foot	Est. Cost per Acre
Conventional micro-embossed 1 mil black plastic 4' width	\$0.027	\$196
Compostable Bio 360 mulch film 0.6 mil black 4' width	\$0.051	\$371
Compostable Film Organics mulch 0.6 mil black 4' width	\$0.052	\$378

Conclusions, Based on Our Experience

If laid properly, the compostable film stays down just as well as conventional. It lasts the whole growing season, and if it is buried in soil, it fully breaks down within 12 months.

Happy growing this season! Further questions or comments: Nate@sunscapefarms.com