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The Governing Board of the Southwest Florida Water Management District (District) recently approved the use of polymer coating agents for a pilot project to protect crops during a freeze event. The District will provide 75% cost share funding for qualified growers* who use polymer coating agents instead of water for freeze protection.

Engage Agro USA is pleased to report Desikote, a Terpene Polymer / coating agent, is one such product option which provides a clear protective film on a plant's surface which reduces transpiration and moisture loss, and reduces the effects of cold and frost events.

An experiment was conducted by Dr. Bielinski M. Santos¹ and Ixchel M. Hernandez² over two seasons (2011-12 and 2012-13) in Florida on strawberry plants. The goal was to evaluate additional methods of frost control, including row covers (light and heavy weight), as well as a foliar application of Desikote.

"Plots protected with light-weight row covers with hoops, heavy-weight row covers without hoops, and those treated with Desikote obtained the highest early marketable fruit count and weight. Sprinklers delivering 4.5 gal/min resulted in the lowest fruit count and weight," states Dr. Santos.

Dave Miller, Southeast Regional Manager for Engage Agro USA, adds; "Applying Desikote for frost protection can have a significant impact for strawberry growers. Growers can benefit from reduced energy and water costs, minimized disease spreading and they can harvest more berries instead of throwing them on the ground."

*Growers within a clearly defined mapped out area (provided by the District), will need to show a water savings and they have to be in compliance with regulations (meter installed etc.) in order to qualify. The reimbursement pilot project is only available in a specific area of stressed water resources referred to by the District as the Dover/Plant City Water Use Caution Area. Growers must register and be approved by the District prior to a freeze event occurring in order to qualify for reimbursement.

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