

MICHAEL'S GREENHOUSES

Cheshire, Connecticut

Successfully Incorporate HydraFiber[®] with Your Existing Preblends

Even though there are thousands of greenhouses around the world, no two growing operations are the same. Some growers strongly believe in blending their own raw materials, while others wouldn't dare to let go of their preblends. The good news is, no matter what strategy growers use for their mixes, there's a HydraFiber[®] solution readily available. In fact, there are several growers across the country who successfully incorporate HydraFiber into their ready-to-use mixes, including Michael's Greenhouses in Cheshire, Connecticut. The company is currently mixing 30% HydraFiber into a preblended mix of 90% peat and 10% perlite using the HydraFiber Expander from AgriNomix.

"We use that mix in almost everything we produce, and we've been successful," said Patrick Herzing, general manager at Michael's Greenhouses. "We've had very little issues starting with our own preblend. This will be our second season with HydraFiber, and it's been great. It incorporates into the mix well. Our growers were initially apprehensive about making any changes, but they were able to easily make the transition."

Herzing says the decision to initially trial with HydraFiber was driven by two big factors: improved water management for a longer shelf life at the store and security during supply shortages. HydraFiber is able to help growers achieve results in both areas.

WATER MANAGEMENT AND SHELF LIFE

During trials of HydraFiber, Herzing noticed a key difference between the advanced fiber substrate and other products he had seen on the market. HydraFiber provides up to 36% more available water to every plant because the Thermally Refined[®] fiber strands have more



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Patrick Herzing, General Manager,
Michael's Greenhouses



HERZING'S ADVICE TO TRANSITION TO HYDRAFIBER

1. Talk to other growers who are using HydraFiber and get their thoughts.
2. Get yourself outfitted with the proper equipment and bring in a load of HydraFiber and try it. You'll soon see that it's going to benefit you. The HydraFiber team will help you every step of the way.
3. Don't be afraid of change. No matter what you change, it can be scary. But HydraFiber has worked well for us, and there's no reason to be scared.

surface area than many other raw materials. The mixes stay hydrated longer, and most growers say they water up to one-third less.

"We ran HydraFiber against a few other products in a hunt for something that would meet our demand," he said. "During trials, we were impressed not only with its ability to retain water, but also its ability to have porosity at the same time, which almost seems like an oxymoron. But it definitely happens. HydraFiber holds water and doesn't dry out as quickly, but at the same time, when it's wet, it doesn't turn into mud or mush."

Herzing also wanted to see improved shelf life for the plants after they were sent to box stores. Without being able to tend to the plants himself, Herzing said they needed something more forgiving that could react with the unpredictability of water schedules at the stores.

"At the large box stores, we always felt like we sent good products there, but the ability for it to stay looking good for any period of time was difficult," he said. "We were looking for a solution that would help us retain a little bit of water and keep us through those difficult times when, on Sunday afternoon, there may not be anybody in the store to water, but the customers were there in full force. HydraFiber was that solution."

"We get asked all of the time whether any additional lime or fertilizer is needed when adding HydraFiber to a ready-to-use blend from a blender," said Daniel Norden, senior technical manager and R&D manager for HydraFiber. "Our recommendation is 'no' in most scenarios, but we recommend discussing with the HydraFiber Account Manager in the grower's region before making any final changes to the fertilizer recommendations."

SUPPLY CHAIN BENEFITS

Like many growing operations, Michael's Greenhouses is no stranger to the current raw material shortages happening around the country with materials like perlite, peat and coir. Herzing says by starting with a preblend and incorporating readily available HydraFiber into the mix, he's been insulated from these challenges. HydraFiber's processing plants are in North Carolina, ensuring the company has an uninterrupted supply of renewable southern yellow pine to create the engineered substrate.

"I have security in my mixes," Herzing said. "And most suppliers out there that I've talked to have not been shy in saying that we take care of our premix customers first. And if I can take my premix and blend it with HydraFiber, which I know will be available and ready for me when I





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need it, then I’ve got a secure solution to the shortages others are facing.”

“Growers across the country are reporting shortages on raw materials and adding HydraFiber to a preblended substrate can be an effective strategy to help mitigate potential shortages,” Norden said. “We have evaluated amending preblended recipes, and we believe growers can be successful with this strategy.”

Herzing says there’s also the added benefit of the cost savings on shipping. HydraFiber has an extremely low bulk density. HydraFiber Ultra, the original product in the HydraFiber lineup, has a 13:1 expansion rate. In comparison, Herzing said he would have to ship in seven loads of peat to get an equivalent amount of raw

material. That’s cost savings he’s able to put into other parts of the business.

“Obviously, everybody talks about dollars and money, and I don’t know that that was one of our biggest driving forces,” he said. “But it is definitely an added benefit.”

Looking back on the initial hesitation that the growers had about the transition, Herzing says it wasn’t needed. Two seasons in, he says growers should try it and see the benefits for themselves.

“I think that you have to look at it as really an opportunity to produce a better crop rather than the fear of the unknown. So take a moment and call somebody who’s using it if you’re concerned, but go ahead, bring in a load of it and try it and see that it’s going to benefit you.”

Our thanks to Patrick for talking with us about Michael’s Greenhouses. If you’re a grower or blender interested in learning more and starting HydraFiber trials, visit HydraFiber.com or reach out to us at hydrafiber@profileproducts.com or 800-496-0955.



PATRICK HERZING FOR MICHAEL’S GREENHOUSES RECEIVES A COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE AND CERTIFICATE FOR BEING ONE OF THE FIRST 100 HYDRAFIBER PROCESSING UNIT INSTALLATIONS.



750 W. Lake Cook Rd., Ste. 440, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089
hydrafiber.com | profileproducts.com
Email: hydrafiber@profileproducts.com
Toll Free: (800) 496-0955 | International Calls: +1 (847) 353-2148

