



# Performance and Adoptability Biodegradable Mulch

biodegradabledmulch.org

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## Summary

*The Technology Adoption Working Group gathers information on grower experiences and opinions to share with scientists designing and testing biodegradable plastic mulch products.*

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## What Is the Technology Adoption Working Group and Why Is It Necessary?

Scientists and engineers spend most of their time in classrooms and laboratories, but they rarely spend much time on working farms. This means they may not understand the day-to-day needs of growers nor the problems they face. The Technology Adoption Working Group takes a social science approach to help natural scientists and engineers understand the experiences and perspectives of growers through surveys, focus groups, and interviews.

## What Is Social Science?

Social science is an area of research that seeks to understand people and their actions. It includes a variety of different areas of study, from rural sociology to anthropology to environmental psychology. While these disciplines focus on different aspects of human life, such as decision-making, culture, and government institutions, they all provide insight into peoples' actions.



Members of the Technology Adoption Working Group discuss their plans for the year at the Project's Annual Meeting in 2015.



## Technology Adoption Working Group

The Technology Adoption Working Group of the USDA-funded project on biodegradable mulch films (*Performance and Adoptability of Biodegradable Plastic Mulch for Sustainable Specialty Crop Production*) is an interdisciplinary team consisting of eight researchers. These researchers have diverse backgrounds spanning rural sociology, anthropology, economics, extension outreach, and horticulture. Together, these team members are interested in understanding the role of plastic film use in specialty crop production and the potential for biodegradable plastic mulch films to replace standard polyethylene (PE) mulch films.

To better understand potential bridges and barriers to the use of biodegradable plastic mulch films, the Technology Adoption Working Group is undertaking several research activities. These activities include nationwide surveys of strawberry and fresh market pumpkin growers, a series of focus groups with stakeholders in Washington State and Tennessee, and six on-farm case studies with multiple experiential field days throughout the growing season. These activities will allow the Technology Adoption Working Group to gather information from a wide variety of specialty crop growers and other stakeholders in order to better understand which growers are most interested in using biodegradable plastic mulch films and what potential problems may prevent other growers from using these products.

This information will be useful for a number of different people. Product designers will be able to refine their biodegradable plastic mulch films to meet the specific needs of specialty crop growers. Extension educators will be able to provide growers with better advice about who should use biodegradable plastic mulch films and how these mulch films should be used. Lastly, specialty crop growers will be able to learn from the experiences other growers have had with specific biodegradable plastic mulch film products.

In summary, the role of the Technology Adoption Working Group is to collect practical information from specialty crop growers on their experiences with and opinions about biodegradable plastic mulch films, and their interest in using such films in the future. Findings from the surveys, focus groups, and on-farm case studies will be summarized in a series of reports for different stakeholder audiences.



Cover page of the national strawberry grower survey questionnaire produced by the Technology Adoption Working Group.