



**STARKE
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BUNCHING ONION PRODUCTION GUIDELINE

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SEEDS OF SUCCESS

BUNCHING ONION

1. HISTORY AND BACKGROUND

Bunching onions belong to the genus *Allium* and are thought to have originated in the far East and are mentioned in Chinese records as long ago as 2000 BC. They are cultivated throughout the world today but are still of special importance in oriental cooking. Bunching onions are very adaptable and grow under a wide range of conditions. Also known as Spring onions, Welsh onions, Scallions, green onions or salad onions. Most cultivated varieties have a white shank and green leaves though colour variations do exist and red-shanked varieties are commercially produced.

The product is usually consumed whole in salads. It is rich in vitamin C and is also a source of Calcium and Iron.

2. ADAPTABILITY

2.1. CLIMATIC REQUIREMENTS

Optimum temperature for germination and plant growth is 24o c. Growth and development will be slow below 12o c. Temperatures above 35o c will adversely affect growth of the crop.

2.2. SOIL REQUIREMENTS

Bunching onions can be grown in most soil types but sand loams are preferred. Good drainage is important and a light soil texture makes cleaning the product easier. Soils with a pH of less than 6 and saline soils should be avoided.

2.3. PRODUCT TYPES

Most bunching onions are white -shanked and marketed whole. This is in bunches or sleeves. Red-shanked varieties are sometimes used to provide contrast in the packaging. Some markets accept just the leaves, cut off above the bulb. This allows for re-growth and repeated harvesting.

3. CULTIVATION PRACTICES

3.1. SOIL PREPERATION

Bunching onions have a relatively shallow root system so deep working is not essential. Drainage is important and any hard layers in the profile should be removed. A fine seed bed is required for direct sown crops. Raised beds to avoid waterlogging should be used where this could become a problem.

3.2. PLANTING TIMES

Bunching onions can be planted year-round in most areas, but development will be very slow in cold winters. Frost will not necessarily lead to plants dying but may damage leaves and increase period to harvest.

3.3. PLANTING

Onions may be sown directly into the soil or seedlings can be used. Planting depth should be 7-10mm followed by irrigation. Where seedlings are used, plugs containing up to 10 seedlings each are planted.

3.4. SPACING

For most purposes 1 to 2 million plants per Hectare are sown. Spacing is 20mm in the rows and 500mm between rows. For the higher population, double rows are sown. The final population has a marked effect on the size of the final product and time taken to maturity. Lower populations give larger plants in a shorter time.

3.5. FERTILIZATION

It is difficult to give accurate guidelines due to the different sizes of onions required by different markets. The following extraction figures can be used as an indication of what the plant needs:

N – 3.9 Kg per ton of product

P – 0.7 Kg per ton of product

K – 4.1 Kg per ton of product

If required, micro-nutrients can be as applied as a foliar feed.

3.6. IRRIGATION

Soil should be kept moist to avoid formation of a crust until seedlings have emerged. Depending on soil type, this will require 15 – 20 mm per week. Thereafter:

From emergence to establishment 20 – 25 mm per week.

From establishment to maturity 25 – 35 mm per week.

These requirements will differ depending on soil type, temperature etc. and should be adapted accordingly.

3.7. OTHER CULTURAL PRACTICES

Weed control is important as bunching onions do not compete well and shading of weeds is minimal due to growth habit. It is important that the field is clear of weeds in the beginning and kept clean. Chemical control is difficult as the crop cycle is so quick and hand cultivation is the only practical option.

4. HARVESTING AND MARKETING

When the onions have reached the required size, they are removed from the beds by hand and any soil washed off. This operation must be done with care as any rough handling will damage the leaves and detract from the appearance of the final product. The leaves and roots may be trimmed according to the specifications of the customer. Most are packed in clear plastic sleeves and delivered to the customer in boxes. The presentation of the product is largely determined by the requirements of the final retailer.

INDEMNITY

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