

LABOR

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To me, labor has several meanings. A nursery operation needs labor, or trained personnel to do the many jobs that must be done correctly and at the right time. Labor is synonymous with cost. Labor is reflected in our seedlings as cost per thousand. It is the nurseryman's duty to produce the best quality seedlings at the least cost. A poor job will almost always give poor results. Some prime examples of this would be fumigation, seeding, and cronartium control. A good job saves time and labor-money. An established nursery has competent personnel that can handle these sometime complicated jobs with little trouble. On the other hand, in a newly established nursery with inexperienced personnel this could be a major problem. The only solution I know is experience. You can get this by hiring experienced personnel or training inexperienced ones--both ways will cost.

In the past, seedlings were grown at densities of 40 to 60 per square foot, labor was .40 to .75c per hour and supplies were cheap by today's standards. The results were low cost seedlings. Today, with our improved seed, high labor and supplies we must realize that our seedlings are going to cost more. Inflation is affecting all facets of our operation. There is no possible way we can produce seedlings today at the prices they have been produced, but we need to hold the cost down as best we can. Labor represents well over half of the cost of our seedlings so this is where we have the greatest opportunity to cut expenses. Automation, new methods and materials have all helped in partially solving this problem.

Planting machines have been developed to space seeds at exactly the desired spacing. Seed cleaning and germination tests have helped make this possible. High value of improved seed has made it very desirable.

Fumigation is now a common practice. This is a very expensive operation, but usually seedlings can be grown cheaper after fumigation than before. Fumigation reduces the labor required for weeding and helps eliminate damages and losses caused by insects, nematodes and diseases.

The hydromulcher saves labor by eliminating the straw raking crews and requires fewer people to spread the material. It also reduces the amount of weed seed being brought into the nursery.

Automated watering systems are being installed in many nurseries that can keep optimum moisture levels in the soil. This frees one or more people for other jobs.

Lifting machines greatly increase the output of seedlings per man day.

A couple of other examples of automation that have been around for a long time are the riding weeding machine and the conveyor belt in the packing room, both regulate the speed of the personnel. Varsol or mineral spirits for weed control should not be over-looked, for this cuts down on expensive hand weeding.

Automatic strapping machines speed packing.

Clay slurry makes bales less bulky and can be handled and stored easier.

Weighing seedlings, rather than counting, saves time and labor.

Cold storage of seedlings permits crews to work in good weather and helps shipping by having seedlings on hand when the crews cannot get in the fields during adverse weather.

These are some of the things that can be done to save labor or increase production with the same labor.