Did You Know....
Virginia Beach is the largest strawberry producer in Virginia

Strawberries were originally grown in Europe and are thought to have been cultivated in ancient Rome
The first known species of American strawberries was cultivated about 1835

- Strawberries are the first fruit to ripen in Spring
- One cup of strawberries contains about 55 calories
- On average there are 200 seeds on a strawberry
- Each year Americans eat approximately 3.4 pounds of fresh strawberries and another 1.8 pounds of frozen strawberries
- California produces 75% of the nation’s strawberry crop and grows about 23,000 acres of strawberries each year
- Approximately 250 acres of strawberries are grown in Virginia, of which 30 acres are grown in Virginia Beach

- Strawberries are not berries or fruit, rather the enlarged end of plant stamen
- Strawberry is in the Rosaceae (Rose) Family
- Unlike most fruit in which seeds are enclosed in the fruit, the strawberry has seeds on the outside skin
- Before 1920 most strawberry breeding was done by growers, since then almost all new varieties were developed by breeders at federal or state experiment stations

Visit our website for the Virginia Beach Strawberry Guide
www.VBgov.com/agriculture

City of Virginia Beach
Agriculture
2449 Princess Anne Road I Virginia Beach, VA 23456
757.385.5775 I Fax:757.385.5684 I VBgov.com
Virginia Beach Strawberries are Red, Ripe & Ready!

31st Annual Pungo Strawberry Festival—May 24th & 25th
1776 Princess Anne Road, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456
Strawberries will be available at the festival to purchase by the quart or to pick at nearby u-pick locations. Be sure to check out the 4-H tent located at the southern end of the festival.

Pungo strawberries grow sweeter with time—Keith Starke

I recently visited the Henley Farm on a cold February morning where I met with Mr. G. W. Henley. My visit was prompted by the fact Virginia Beach has the largest concentrated acres (30) of strawberry production in the state. Mr. Henley has 10 acres of strawberries (Genus-Fragaria) which accounts for one-third of the local crop. It’s obvious he knows a thing or two when it comes to growing acres of delicious “Pungo” strawberries. After all, he has been growing these sweet red berries for almost 50 years. He grew his first strawberry crop in the mid 1960’s and he has been growing them ever since.

He is the first to tell you that growing strawberries hasn’t always been a bed of roses, Many of his memories highlighted the variability in our local weather patterns from year to year. He mentioned some early years, when there was too much rain or not enough. This was long before he started using drip irrigation under a plastic mulch layer, otherwise known as “plasticulture.” The plastic mulch helps warm the soil in early spring and it also helps reduce weeds that compete with the crop for soil nutrients and water. Another advantage of using the plastic mulch is the fruit doesn’t come in contact with the soil.

Mr. Henley has accumulated a wealth of knowledge and stated “strawberries are a delicate crop to manage, although the strawberry plants go dormant in the winter that doesn’t mean you just plant in the fall and forget about them until spring.”

I asked Mr. Henley to summarize what he has learned through his years of growing strawberries, he plainly replied, “that I know less about growing strawberries now than I did when I started!” It’s not that he hasn’t learned more each year, but the science and technology of farming continues to advance. He has seen strawberry production transition from the “matted row” production system (a system that uses wheat straw as mulch) to the plasticulture system. He has grown more than 20 different strawberry cultivars over the years. Mostly, in an effort to identify which types perform best in our region. Mr. Henley has overcome a multitude of farming challenges and he has proven he knows how to produce great tasting strawberries. After all, his methods have been tested by Mother Nature for nearly fifty years!

Mr. Henley installing plastic mulch for his strawberry crop.