

AUGUST 2015

## Sunscald Very Prevalent in Peppers This Year

I know this seems very obvious to most growers as we have sunscald every year in our vegetable plantings. This year just seems to be especially bad as I have gotten several calls from growers about a strange problem in their peppers that looks like sunscald, but couldn't be. The reason given that it could not be sunscald is because the plants have thick foliage and the fruit seem well covered.

Fig. 1 Pepper fruit with small and large areas of sunscald and black mold growth



Sunscald occurs when peppers or other vegetables are exposed to the direct rays of the sun during hot weather; the damaged areas may become papery and bleached or tan colored, and these areas often are covered with a black fungal growth (Fig 1). It is more apparent on plants that have sparse foliage or that have lost a large proportion of

leaves to a leaf-defoliating disease. But almost all the farms I visited had plants that looked very good (Fig. 2). The problem is that pepper plants often lean to one side or the other because of winds blowing them in certain directions. When this occurs sunscald can be especially prevalent on previously shaded pepper fruit that

Fig. 2 Pepper plant that appears to have good foliage for fruit cover but still has sunscald fruit



are suddenly exposed to the sun, even for a short period time. The damaged areas are vulnerable to infection by fungi (Black mold), and bacteria, so that at times a pepper fruit will be found that is a soupy, smelly watery mess. Sunscald is most prevalent on green fruit. Staking and tying pepper plants will greatly decrease the leaning plants and greatly decrease sunscald. The pepper plants do not have to be tied often, usually once is all it takes and stakes do not need to be any taller than the pepper

plants (so broken tomato stakes work well) (Fig 3). Peppers in a tied vs. non tied section of field had vastly different sunscald problems. The stake and tied section had less than 2% of fruit sunscald damaged; the non-tied section had 17% sunscald damaged fruit. Same variety planted the same day.

*Fig. 3 Staked and tied pepper plants, 4-5 plants between stakes, one string*

