

## Tarping for Reduced Tillage in Small-Scale Vegetable Systems

### *Winter 2021 Farmer Reflections: Problems*

What issues or problems came up for you?
Wind. Also tarps harboring rodents that ate holes in tarps and damaged a lot of our beet crop.
Mid-summer tarp left on 3+ weeks seem to have bare fallow effect on direct seeded fall crops, really poor germ etc.
Wind lifted and moved some, heavy to move, sometimes did not have sufficient time to kill weeds beneath
The biggest issue that came up for us with tarps is keeping them weighted down. We've had to chase all our tarps around a little bit at least once! Even though every time we think we have enough weights on them.
Labor intensive, hard to make time for moving them in the mid-summer craziness
VOLES!!
Until we learned to use an adequate number of black bags filled with an adequate amount of sand to hold them down, we were chasing tarps in the wind.
Just our dog ripping the tarps as she is trying to get at voles that make their home underneath them. She also likes to get underneath the tarp and run around.
Weeds eventually germinated and became problematic
Our tarps got picked up by the wind a few times. We still had significant weed pressure, but it was a wet July which really allowed the weeds to flourish. The tarps can be difficult and time consuming to move.
Pooling of water on tarped raised beds was a minor hassle
Sometimes they get blown up by the wind or damaged by deer/other impacts. There was a rat living under one! And voles regularly like to live under them. Moving them is a pain, especially when wet, and they leave bare spots if we have them bunched in one location too long. It can also be tricky to plan for bed use since they're laid out in blocks of beds, so you must have a clear section and not need to replant middle beds first.
Wind moving it, putting it back on
The clear plastic was too thin. We buried the ends rather than sandbag and had a hard time removing it.
The winter tarping period didn't seem to help with weeds (too cool of temperatures in November and April?) Also, we had a lot of carpetweed on the farm this season, and tarping didn't seem to affect that either.
Persistent weeds like horse nettle and bind weed continue to be a challenge
In the winter and spring, wind is always a problem: we can't keep tarps on. We also had some problems with compaction in some beds, perhaps mostly due to a pretty dry year, and we do end up doing more hand bed prep than I would prefer, particularly if we're tarping an area where there's a lot of plant material.
After tarping, the soil is so compact that we always have to go through with a broadfork, which is really time intensive.