Introduction

Most of the strawberries produced in Florida are shipped fresh to locations throughout the eastern U.S. and Canada. Therefore, Florida growers need cultivars that produce fruit that are attractive and flavorful, and maintain these qualities during and after long-distance shipment. 'Strawberry Festival' strawberry has produced commercially acceptable yields of firm, attractive, and flavorful fruit in trials at the University of Florida's Gulf Coast Research and Education Center in Dover (GCREC-Dover) and in two commercial fields in west central Florida. It is recommended for trial in areas where strawberries are grown in the annual hill plasticulture system. The clone was named 'Strawberry Festival' in recognition of the Florida Strawberry Festival®, an annual festival in Plant City that celebrates the abundant crop of berries harvested in eastern Hillsborough County during late February and early March.

Origin

'Strawberry Festival' originated from a 1995 cross between 'Rosa Linda' and 'Oso Grande'. 'Rosa Linda', a 1996 release from the Florida Agricultural Experiment Station, was used as a parent because of its high early season yield potential and its desirable fruit shape. 'Oso Grande', a University of California cultivar, was used as a parent because of its ability to produce large, firm fruit. The original plant of 'Strawberry Festival' was selected in 1995 from a field nursery at GCREC-Dover. 'Strawberry Festival', tested as selection FL 95-41, has been evaluated in replicated plot trials at Dover and in observational trials for two years at the University of Florida's Suwannee Valley Research and Education Center, Live Oak.

Description and Performance

'Strawberry Festival' is a short day cultivar. It has a vigorous plant that tends to produce numerous runners if planted in early October in central Florida.

Figure 1. 'Strawberry Festival' plant.
The fruit is attached to long pedicels, and has a mean fruit weight similar to that of 'Sweet Charlie' (Fig. 1). The fruit are mostly conic in shape (Fig. 2). The external color of fully mature fruit is deep red; internal color is a bright red. The calyx is large and showy. Fruit of 'Strawberry Festival' have a firm texture and excellent flavor. 'Strawberry Festival' does not initiate fruiting as early as 'Sweet Charlie' or 'Earlibrite', but in commercial fields during the 2000-01 season it produced higher early season yields than 'Camarosa'. In the observational plots at Live Oak, 'Strawberry Festival' was less vigorous and had lower fruit yields than 'Camarosa', but was more vigorous and had higher fruit yields than 'Sweet Charlie'. 'Strawberry Festival' is susceptible to anthracnose fruit rot (caused by *Colletotrichum acutatum*), Colletotrichum crown rot (caused by *Colletotrichum gloeosporioides*), and angular leaf spot (caused by *Xanthomonas fragariae*); therefore we recommend that fruit growers choose their transplant source carefully to avoid starting off their season with infected plants. 'Strawberry Festival' is less susceptible than 'Sweet Charlie' to Botrytis fruit rot (caused by *Botrytis cinerea*), and less susceptible than 'Camarosa' to powdery mildew (caused by *Sphaerotheca macularis*).

Figure 2. 'Strawberry Festival' fruit.

**Availability**

The Florida Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Floridas Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences has applied for a U.S. plant patent on 'Strawberry Festival', and this cultivar has been uniquely characterized using DNA fingerprinting technology. 'Strawberry Festival' is licensed to the Florida Strawberry Growers Association by Florida Foundation Seed Producers, Inc. Information on nurseries sub-licensed to propagate Strawberry Festival can be obtained from the Florida Strawberry Growers Association, P.O. Drawer 2550, Plant City, FL 33564.