

Economic Assessment – Activities Report
Methyl Bromide Alternatives

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Since the economic assessment of the alternatives to the use of methyl bromide is a transversal objective in the project, one of the first actions was to set up coordination meetings with the scientist involved in the technical part of the project. Based on these meetings it was established that the more practical way to address this objective is to gather all the economic information based on growers activities and then match this information with the activities that will be carried out in the research field. Therefore, it has been assumed that the field research production will follow conventional production techniques and that the main source of variation will be the treatments applied in each case.

Based in these initial conversations and visits to growers a first draft of the surveys was designed. afterward, these drafts were pre-test with growers. This exercise was useful to develop a more accurate survey and also to develop two different strategies for the gathering process, one for conifer seedling and other for perennial growers. It was decided that in the case of conifer growers the economic information would be collected through the entire production season by mean of a form designed for that propose. On the other hand, the information corresponding to perennial growers will be collect in personal interviews. The final version of the survey was sent to the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) for approval, which has been already granted.

The conifer survey is divided in three parts. The first part is designed to collect general information about the operation, once this part is filled out it should be sent it back by mail. The second part of the survey is designed to collect information regarding current activities and inputs for conifer seedling production, and should be filled out monthly over the growing season, the data for this part of the form should be collected from a parcel selected for this propose. The last part is a form to be filled out one time once the harvest records of the selected parcel are available.

The gathering process in the case of conifer growers has already begun, 21 surveys were sent by mail. So far 9 growers have responded sending back the first part of the survey which, as it was mentioned above, addresses general information about their production. Some preliminary are presented in the following table:

Table 1¹. Preliminary results based on part I of the survey.

Variable	Units	Average	Min	Max	Total
Labor Cost:					
Supervisor	US\$/hour	19.6	15.0	30.0	n/a
Skilled Labor	US\$/hour	12.8	8.0	15.0	n/a
Seasonal Labor	US\$/hour	8.2	6.0	10.0	n/a
Production Acreage:					
White Pine	acre	1.2	0.5	3.0	9.5
Fraser Fir	acre	2.6	0.1	6.0	15.6
Total Seedling Acres	acre	22.4	5.0	40.0	179.0

¹ These figures are subject to change along as more growers send back their forms.

These preliminary results were presented on September the 17th, in the annual meeting of the Michigan Seedling Grower Association. This opportunity was also useful to show the scope of the study and to motivate the rest of the growers to take part of the study. As part of the results of this meeting an ad hoc committee was established to facilitate and improve the participation of the growers. However, since the end of the year is a busy season for the sector, the first meeting with this committee will be held the first days of February.

In the case of perennial growers the survey to be used is ready and growers will be contacted during spring to set up personal interviews. The potential number of growers that may take part in the study is around 15.

Parallel some progress has been achieved in the objective 1b, which aims to assess plug-based production systems as an alternative to field production. A form to collect the information for this type of production has been designed, and one of the most important growers that use this production system in Michigan has been already interviewed. Currently new farms, that use this production system are being identified, however this could be hard, since the small number of farms that currently use this system, it exists even the possibility of getting in touch with farms out of Michigan.

During the first weeks of January it is planned to have some coordination meeting with the scientist in charge of the field research to ensure that the technical information from the experiments and the economic information that it has been collected will match.

Finally, it is important to highlight the useful support that Tom Dudek and Rob Richardson have provided during this process.