Preparing for a dry irrigation season

With the hot weather upon Hawke's Bay, now is the time to start preparing for a dry summer. Here are the top tips for getting through.

Pre-Season Maintenance

Now is a great time to get your irrigation system in tip top condition to see you through. Depending on your irrigation system type, pre-season maintenance can include:

- flushing mainlines or laterals to remove debris and prevent blockages
- give blocked sprinklers a good clean out
- check filters are clean and working properly
- replace broken parts
- check pivot tyre pressures
- grease and oil irrigator parts as per manufacturer's instructions.

Fix leaks, it's a win win

When is a leak not just a leak?

When it stops the rest of the irrigation system from performing as it should. Irrigation systems are designed for a particular flow and operating pressure. Leaks can affect these parameters, which then impacts the remainder of the irrigation system. Fixing leaks can improve:

- how even water is applied - known as Distribution or Emitter Uniformity (DU & EU)
- reduce irrigation times and total water used
- produce more even crop growth
- reduce soil and track damage.

Fight the signs of an ageing irrigator

Is your irrigation system getting on in years?

Unfortunately, irrigation systems don't get better with age. Regular maintenance can help keep your irrigation system in good working order for longer.

As you would expect for any hard-wearing mechanical equipment, irrigation performance checks on over 100 Hawke's Bay irrigation systems show that as irrigation systems age the performance deteriorates. This becomes more noticeable at about 10 years old. Conversely this study also showed that a well-maintained older system can still perform well.

To keep getting value from your investment and minimise environmental impact, regular maintenance is a priority.

Better for your crop and better for the environment

Visit hbrc.govt.nz, search: #irrigation

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Knowledge up for better irrigation

They say 'knowledge is power' or at the very least, it will help you make better decisions. There are some things you can do now to help you make better decisions when it comes to irrigation.

- Get to know your soil water parameters so you know when to start and stop applying water. Check out the Soil Profile Builder to know your numbers or check with your rural advisor. Find out more and download the Builder at ***hbrc.info/SoilPB***
- Monitor soil moisture levels throughout the season to help you decide when to irrigate.
- Check the weather forecast before irrigating to make the most of any rainfall events. A full soil profile will not get the benefit of rainfall.
- Upskill - Irrigation NZ have developed a range of well targeted online courses to help you make better irrigation decisions. Check out the Irrigation Scheduling, Operation and Maintenance, Crop and Climate courses at: ***irrigationnz.co.nz/EventsAndTraining/UpcomingEvents***
- Find out how well your irrigation system stacks up by doing a basic bucket test to check how evenly your system applies irrigation water. Or get a qualified irrigation system performance evaluator to do a full evaluation.

Visit ***hbrc.govt.nz, search: #irrigation*** or the Irrigation NZ website ***irrigationnz.co.nz/PracticalResources/GMP/Scheduling*** to find out more.

Get to know your consent

Reading your consent document isn't usually at the top of the summer reading list – but it should be!

Take some time to read and understand your consent conditions, especially if you have consents in multiple locations, or have recently been issued a new consent.

Water take consent conditions can differ depending on the location of the take and environmental factors in that area. Make sure anyone managing your irrigation system knows the relevant consent conditions, for each take point.

Consents for irrigation all have limits around how much water can be taken and/or when. This can be about how quickly water can be abstracted (rate of take), or how much volume can be taken within a certain period of time (e.g. 7 day, 28 day, or seasonal allocation volume).

For some, in a dry season this can mean reaching the allocation volume or a minimum flow trigger, and that means turning off irrigation. This just another reason to have a well performing irrigation system with good irrigation scheduling - to get the most effective use out of your consented take, when you can.

New irrigation system installed recently?

You need to know key irrigation parameters like operating pressures and flows at installation. These figures often vary slightly from the initial irrigation design because of real world factors.

An 'As Built Plan' with key operating information will help you to keep track of your system. Irrigation systems will deteriorate over time. Knowing if your system is operating outside of 'normal' will help identify issues early.

Talk with your irrigation supplier today about getting an 'As Built Irrigation Commissioning Report' with key operating information.

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