

● **Subirrigation**
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even in a wet year, Mitchell points out.

Several problems have been noted, however. In material presented at the American Society of Agronomy annual meeting, Mitchell said roots plugging the small holes of the pipe is a major concern. The pipe holes are extremely small and the water is flowing slowly under low pressure; these factors all encourage plugging, cutting down irrigation effectiveness.

In greenhouse studies under conditions that encouraged far more concentrated root growth

than under field conditions, plugging took place the first one or two times the irrigation system was used. Mitchell found that briefly increasing pressure to five pounds unplugged the system, restoring as much as 95 percent. The brief pressure increase could be used in the field to reduce plugging, Mitchell believes.

Research also shows that the crop being irrigated makes a difference in the amount of plugging. Corn roots, for instance, cause less plugging than alfalfa. One reason may be that small cavities form outside the pipe holes more readily with corn. When such spaces are

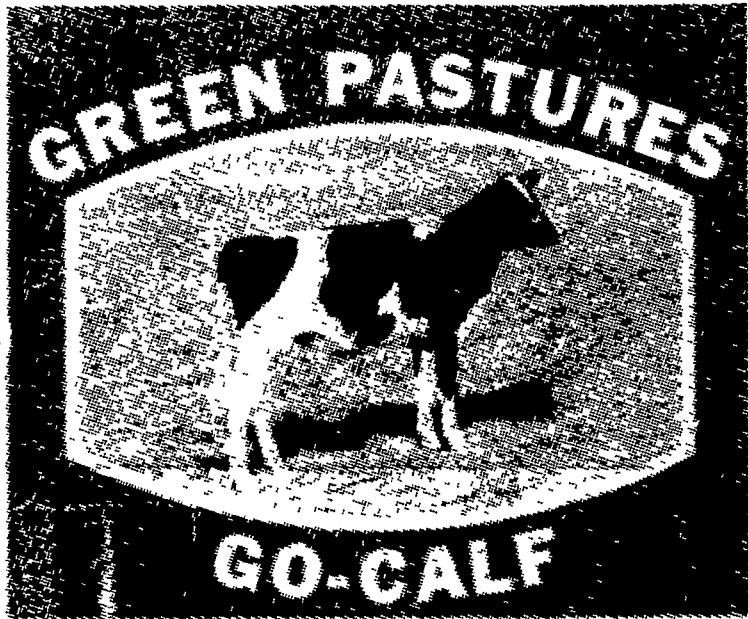
present, finer soil particles and roots may be less likely to enter the holes and cause plugging.

Although plugging is a problem in subirrigation, it doesn't seem to be a great limitation on the effectiveness of the system. Research will provide the answers, Mitchell believes.

Many improvements have been made since the subirrigation system was put down in the Georgetown substation. Yet even that system resulted in an average increase of 71 bushels per acre of corn over a three year period.

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