

# Fertigation Becomes

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quick to recover," he said. Gault said that many growers have misconceptions about drip irrigation. He said that people believe the tree is pampered and may go out to a landscape situation and "suffer."

Gault said, "In fact, the exact opposite is true. The tree is shocked less when it's transplanted and it's got more roots, so it's quicker to root out into its new home and re-establish itself and be a contender in the landscape."

Growers can actually save money over the installation cost, which Gault estimates to be about \$1 more per tree. But plants can be brought to market 25 percent to 35 percent earlier, he said. And losses because of drought stress without irrigation can range from 7-10 percent on an annual basis.

## Losing less

"With irrigation, we're losing less than 1 percent annually," he said. "And if you're lining out 10,000 trees, at \$10 a piece, and you're saving 10 percent, it's quick to pay for itself. And you're going to be coming to market not only in 25 to 35 percent less time, but with 25 to 35 percent more product than with traditional methods."

Each station is equipped to first fertilize and then irrigate. The fertilizer is applied a small amount on a daily basis. Different amounts can be relegated to different sites, so each tree can be grown to specific uniformity. "And you don't have to depend on Mother Nature to get it washed into the root zone or wash it away."

Gault said that through proper timing of the fertilizer through the irrigation system, "you can push several flushes of growth from May until July for top growth. We'll fertilize, say, the middle of October till the middle of November to get caliper growth, and then again in February. It's going to give you more of the girth of the tree to 'balance out.'"

## Effective way

"Drip irrigation is the most effective and efficient way you could possibly irrigate," said Jim Roberts, Roberts Irrigation, San Marcos, Calif. Roberts spoke recently at the 1991 Pennsylvania Vegetable Conference about the benefits of using drip irrigation.

He cautioned that some of the legislation pending or already passed in California (which has required fruit and vegetable farmers near him to pay fines that have forced many of them out of business) could also happen in Pennsylvania.

"I'm telling this to caution you," he said. "If the label says four ounces per acre, don't put on six. Because they've got ways to monitor that now and they'll likely find out that you didn't follow the label. We saw farmers do that in California and they're literally out of business."

Roberts said, by using drip irrigation, nutrients are fed through the system in "very limited amounts. And if you're doing it right, you're going to monitor the needs of the plant and you're going to adjust the fertilizer accordingly."

## 100 tons of tomatoes

In results of several tests, growers in Roberts' area achieved 50 tons and, in some cases, up to 100 tons per acre of tomatoes using drip irrigation.

Also, pesticide and fumigant applications to the soil offered more exact results. The nutrients applied helped greatly extend some crops.

Roberts recommended that a media filter be used if the water used to irrigate may be dirty. Also, acids to clean the system and to keep the pores open are necessary. But the acids (phosphoric and sulphuric) are also important elements to the plants.

Roberts said that farmers in this area should keep an eye on California, because farmers may face the same type of legislation in the future. In once case, farmers in California are also responsible for

what they apply. When a chemical dealer sells to a farmer, a record of what is sold must match what the farmer applies, or farmers face stiff fines.

## Small basis

"You better try the drip method and try to find out what it will do for you," said Roberts. "I would suggest you try it on a small basis,

till you find out how to manage the system."

Roberts said that "one of the things I think is extremely important for all of you today is to realize your responsibility in this whole area," he said. "Read the labels, learn how to apply these chemicals, and make sure we do not create any more problems."

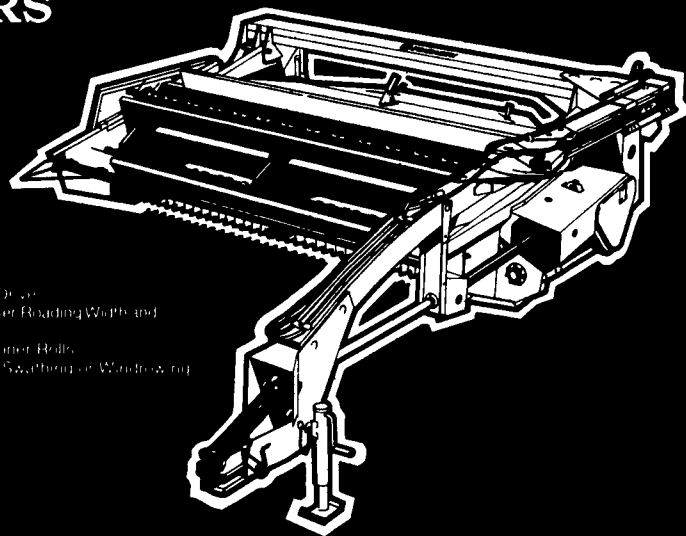
"We are, in this area, blessed

with tremendous topsoil and everything," said John Gault, of Gault Nursery Corp. "And the rainfall has been good.

"There is too much going down to the Chesapeake Bay through the watershed area here," he said. "We only have one world here. We really beat the heck out of it for a while. But I think we have to get smart about it."

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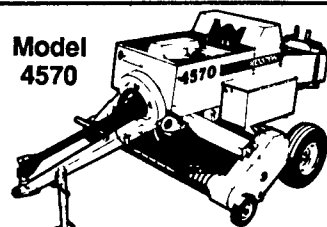
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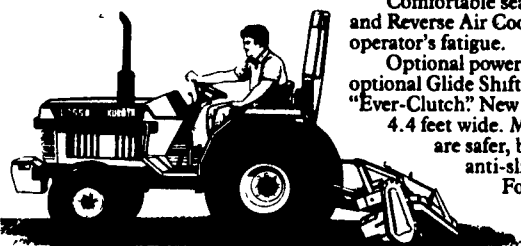
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