

NETAFIM DRIP IRRIGATION SUCCESS STORY

ALFALFA



DRIP IS THE FUTURE OF FARMING

Richie Gunter is excited about the future of agriculture.

Gunter, a retired Marine Corps veteran who felt called to serve his country after September 11, now farms just outside of Woodland, California. Currently he has 100 acres of alfalfa on drip irrigation and says drip is the future of farming.

"We can grow bigger, better, sometimes 30% more crop, use less water and create almost zero waste," says Gunter, surveying a field of alfalfa with a large smile. "I mean, it's just common sense!"

While walking through a freshly drip-irrigated alfalfa field (virtually dry due to the drip tapes' 10"-12" depth in the soil), Gunter recalls the days of farming with his grandfather and is amazed at how far agriculture has come with technological advances.

"We're growing more with less," exclaims Gunter. "Tractors that drive themselves, irrigation systems that practically run themselves and computers that tell you every detail of your farm - I don't think my grandfather would have ever thought we'd see the day."

With six to seven cuttings per year with his drip irrigated alfalfa, Gunter, who originally started with growing tomatoes on drip, wonders why he didn't start earlier. When he got back into farming after his military service, he knew he had to find better ways to farm than he had been doing just 10 short years before.

Now, says Gunter, "I need to be 100% on drip in the next few years or I'll be behind the curve. It's like tracking the markets for crop prices, you've got to know what's coming in terms of technology and get ahead of it."

Gunter estimates his average payback time on a drip irrigation system is approximately three years, given current alfalfa prices. He plans to rotate his drip fields with other crops based on soil conditions and pricing. With 40" spacing, the transition between crops such as sunflowers, wheat, corn and tomatoes is nearly seamless as long as the wheel rows are shifted to avoid over-compaction.

"Once you get the timing right, and it only takes a couple of irrigations, you're all set," says Gunter. "I'm looking at about a 10% water savings, which is important since my water is metered."

When encouraging others farmers to make the move to drip, Gunter, who is noticeably younger than many of his grower counterparts, just asks one question: "Why not?"

"You've got a system that's going to last 8, 9, 10 years," says Gunter. "If you're going to pay it off in the first three, how could you possibly not want to do this?"