

NETAFIM DRIP IRRIGATION SUCCESS STORY

ALFALFA

NICO SLABBER



DRIP IRRIGATION ALLOWS ME TO GROW MORE WITH LESS RESOURCES

Nico Slabber's roots in agriculture run deep - no pun intended. As a native of Zimbabwe who came to the United States after also farming in South Africa, Slabber understands the potential of technology in agriculture and the vital role drip irrigation plays in the imminent needs of the industry.

"Drip is the only thing left for the future of water," says Slabber, with a cheerful accent. "It's just so simple."

Slabber, who today is the general manager of B & R Tevelde Farms in Hanford, California, is in his third year of growing alfalfa on drip irrigation and couldn't be happier with the results. He cites water savings, better quality and a two-ton to the acre yield increase as his reasons for being an early adopter of the technology. He recognizes that there are still skeptics, though, because he used to be one.

"I wanted to understand how I could grow more with less resources," notes Slabber. "On paper drip worked and I wanted to see if it would work in practice too."

With his total acreage in drip irrigation hovering at about 80 acres, Slabber is now a true believer in drip technology, with plans to expand the practice of drip irrigation across his entire operation. He notes that with the right combination of spacing and crop rotation, the opportunities for drip are extremely diverse.

WHY I SWITCHED TO DRIP

- ✓ TWO-TON TO THE ACRE YIELD INCREASE
- ✓ WATER SAVINGS
- ✓ BETTER QUALITY ALFALFA
- ✓ QUICKER APPLICATION OF WATER TO THE CROP

"Sure, there are mistakes you have to make when you're first starting out," says Slabber. "It's not like you install the system and walk away; you've got to give yourself setup time and learn." Slabber goes on to say, however, that after the learning curve levels out, the benefits of drip irrigation far outweigh any stumbling blocks. Among the features that Slabber finds the most impressive about drip is its ability to provide water to crops in hours instead of days.

"With flood irrigation, it might take me upwards of ten days to move water across all of my alfalfa," says Slabber. "With drip irrigation, it's one flip of the switch and you're ready in less than a day."

A variable drive system installed with the drip irrigation equipment helps Slabber to manage irrigation for different soil types. As a result, Slabber now has a better understanding of how water moves through a field and interacts with the crop

because the process of drip is so instantaneous. He believes he can service the crop better by getting it what it needs quickly without the risk of stressing the plants. Furthermore, drip irrigation after harvesting can be completed in specific zones that can't be done with flood, so cutting alfalfa and watering in the same day is possible.

When it came to choosing a drip irrigation company, Slabber selected Netafim for reasons beyond cost. "For me, installing something like a drip system that has to perform and last comes down to quality and support," says Slabber. "And I get those things with Netafim."