

Burdekin farmer Aaron Linton says trickle tape has created significant water savings and other efficiencies at his farm.



Trickle investment delivers water use efficiency

The investment in trickle-tape irrigation is yielding positive results for Burdekin farmer Aaron Linton.
By Brad Pfeffer

Mr Linton farms near Home Hill with his father Joe and over the last three years they have made an increased move to trickle tape irrigation strategically across their farms, with encouraging results. The technology may be far from common-place in the water abundant Burdekin region, but Aaron Linton said that the investment made sense for their farming operation.

The trickle tape is used over about 35 percent of his farm, installed at depth of 250 mm and able to apply water at as much as 7.5 mm per day, which allows ample capacity to maintain water to the crop each day. The trickle tape has been used to positive effect at parts of the farm where there was significant water run-off, reducing this run-off entirely.

A recycle pit captures water runoff from traditional fluming irrigation and reuses it in the trickle tape, meaning a very efficient use of water and a more even crop overall.

And while Aaron said it is difficult to estimate the yield advantage, he estimates that he could be 25-30 tonne per hectare better off under the trickle tape, based on a harvest of the plant cane and the first ratoon in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

With Burdekin water allocations having been reduced in 2015, the system has also reduced concerns about water supplies looking ahead to the summer.

“However the electricity price is the biggest challenge. Because it requires a higher pressure, it is a higher cost per megalitre,” he said. “But I also use fewer megalitres. That’s why this year I am doing trials to compare the drip to fluming irrigation to see how the numbers stack up.”

There are also a range of considerations that enter into the equation, including labour.

“As I can fertigate through it, I have had crops where the harvester has gone through and the next piece of machinery in the paddock is the harvester the next year. The fertiliser went out with the tape and with no rain when the cane was small there was no need for me to go into the paddock to control weeds.”

He is also able to operate the system from anywhere over the Internet. In addition, he added that while maintenance was important, the total workload was less than that of usual irrigation.

“I run hydrogen peroxide through it to stop algae growing inside the tape as well as flushing out extraneous matter. If there is a rat in there or a rat hole I need to fix that, but it hasn’t been much of an issue and it has been a lot quicker to fix those issues than laying the fluming just once.”