

Irrigation systems need attention each fall



Brenna Wiegand/Capital Press
Trevor Spires of Stettler Supply with a Reinke center pivot irrigation system. The automated system moves on its own, decreasing labor costs.

By **BRENNA WIEGAND**
For the Capital Press

Stettler Supply has been doing irrigation since the Stettler brothers returned to Salem, Ore., from World War II in 1948.

Still locally owned, Stettler Supply designs, constructs, repairs and sells irrigation systems and their components.

“We are a Reinke dealer and sell a lot of overhead traveling systems — center pivots and linear sprinklers,” General Manager Trevor Spires said. “Other types of systems include self-powered aluminum wheel lines and drip irrigation.”

In sandier soils drip tape may be buried underground alongside row crops when they’re planted and replaced the next planting season. Above-ground drip irrigation is for permanent crops such as hazelnuts and blueberries. Both drip systems allow emitters to be placed at the desired locations for a specific application.

Whatever the type, as fall

and winter approach it is imperative to drain and flush the system so lines and filters don’t freeze.

This is best accomplished before the rain sets in and access to the fields becomes more difficult. In the spring, flush systems to clear out sand and other particulates that can plug emitters.

Farmers are always looking for ways to be more efficient with water and energy.

Radio monitoring and control of pumps, valves and automated timers save on labor, or farmers can control things from a cell phone. Field weather stations can also measure moisture in the soil and make real-time adjustments to irrigation.

In addition, drones and satellite imagery provide aerial photos that show areas being missed by irrigation and detect other issues.

Greater mechanization is a common theme in the ag community to reduce the associated costs and not be subject to the scarcity of workers.

“We feel the effects in our construction projects when we’re trying to find qualified labor; on the farm, they’re having a hard time harvesting crops,” Spires said. “We have one customer who is moving away from aluminum handline irrigation to a traveling system because he can’t find labor to move the irrigation pipes.

“It’s a job I did in high school but nobody wants to do that anymore; moving through a corn patch, water dripping on your head and the corn cutting your arms.”

Now he’s using GPS survey equipment to map out fields, row spacing, crop spacing and other factors as

Stettler Supply works with customers in designing the right system for them.

“Farmers are incredibly smart, resourceful people,” Spires said. “They know their crops and their soil and their objectives better than anybody and they all do things a little differently.

“It’s ingenious the tools and equipment they invent to do things the way they want,” Spires said. “We carry 800,000 pieces in our store but it is still difficult to stock everything that everybody might want. There’s a sense of urgency in farming I don’t have in other industries.”

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