

Weekly Ag Report
David Lile
June 27, 2012

This is David Lile with this weeks' Ag Report.

As we move into the heart of summer, irrigation season is in full swing. Irrigation from both surface and groundwater are vital to productive agriculture here in Lassen County. Depending on their source of water, farmers use either flood, wheel line, or center pivot irrigation systems. Center pivots represent the newest technology and where they fit we see them replacing wheel lines on more and more fields. Pivots are an expensive investment, but the pay back in efficiency is impressive. With center pivots farmers can more precisely control the rate and timing of application to meet crop needs. Have yet to talk to a farmer with a pivot who regretted making the transition.

No matter what system is used, applying the correct amount of water at the right time is critical to achieving optimum yield and profit. Too little water will stress the crop and can dramatically reduce production, while applying too much water is waste of dollars in pumping costs. A couple of tools that we can recommend to determine crop water needs are the Watermark soil moisture sensors, or the use of Evapotranspiration data. Soil moisture sensors are a few inches long and are placed in the field at crop rooting depth. These sensors can help farmers quickly assess how much soil moisture is present and how long until the next irrigation will be needed. Evapotranspiration data is available on-line, it's collected at weather stations and indicates the amount of water a perennial grass or alfalfa crop would use based on the temperature, wind, and humidity. In Lassen County potential crop water use in mid-summer can reach two inches of water per week. And, by the way the soil moisture sensors and Et data can also be used for lawns and turf fields as well. If you would like more information on irrigation management, give us a call at the Cooperative Extension office at 251-8133. Until next week, this is David Lile with the Crop Report.