



Love Almonds

In Defense of Almonds

GROWERS ARE FINDING WAYS TO PRODUCE HEALTHY TREES, REDUCE THE USE OF PESTICIDES AND SAVE WATER, DESPITE THE DROUGHT

Almonds are getting a bad rap. Yes, we've all read the news about them sucking up lots of California's dwindling water supply. The headlines would have us believe that growing almonds should be a criminal offense. But the vilification of this particular variety of nut seems to be blown out of proportion. Although we all need to be exploring ways to reduce the need for our increasingly scarce natural resource, when it comes to water usage, the California almond is not the culprit that it has been made out to be by some media outlets.

According to the Almond Board of California, the amount of water needed to grow almonds is comparable to what many other California crops require. In fact, contrary to the sensational media coverage of late, other types of farming such as dairy, alfalfa and rice, require considerably more water per acre. Comparatively, almonds are among the most effective ways to get good protein in your diet in relation to the water it needs to grow. USDA data indicates growing a pound of almonds requires 276 gallons of water. Other sources of high protein such as poultry, cheese, pork and beef require upwards of triple that amount of water to produce.

That being said, today's California almond growers are critically aware of the State's rapidly decreasing water resources. Most are actively seeking and finding innovative methods to reduce the amount of water needed to harvest their important crop. The promising news is if you track the use of innovative production practice over the past 30 years, data supports that **almond growers have steadily improved their water efficiency by 33% for every pound of almonds grown today.**

"Compared to the average grower in this area, my need to spray for bugs is a lot less. I speak to other growers around here and I know that they're using insecticides much more than I do. I know my trees are a lot healthier than others around here; everyone who stops by, comments on how good the trees look. We're all caring for our trees the same way, but the difference the other growers aren't using Magnation."

~ Mike Etchegoiberry
Fresno almond grower

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN IRRIGATION

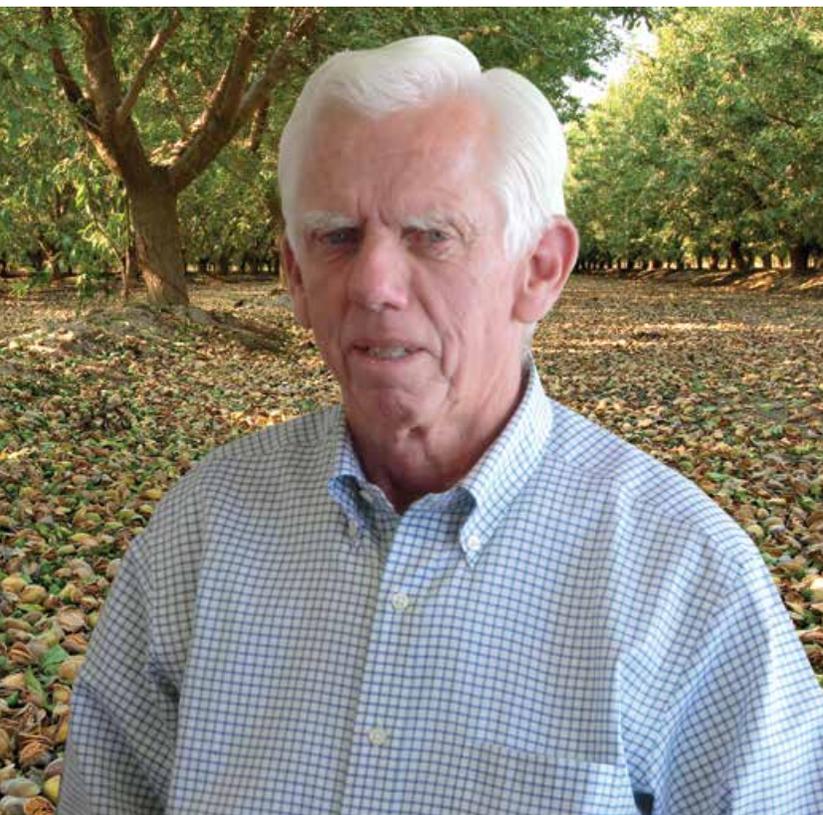
According to research conducted by the ABC, 83% of almond growers review weather, soil moisture and the trees needs to create customized irrigation strategies that include advances in irrigation practices to save water. Over the past several decades, as water resources have become increasingly depleted, the use of micro-irrigation systems has replaced older technologies such as flood or sprinkler systems in most almond orchards. Micro-irrigation refers to low-pressure irrigation systems that spray, mist, sprinkle or drip water. This type of irrigation has not only been shown to be water-efficient by delivering precise amounts of water required by individual trees, but also reduces evaporative losses from windy conditions.

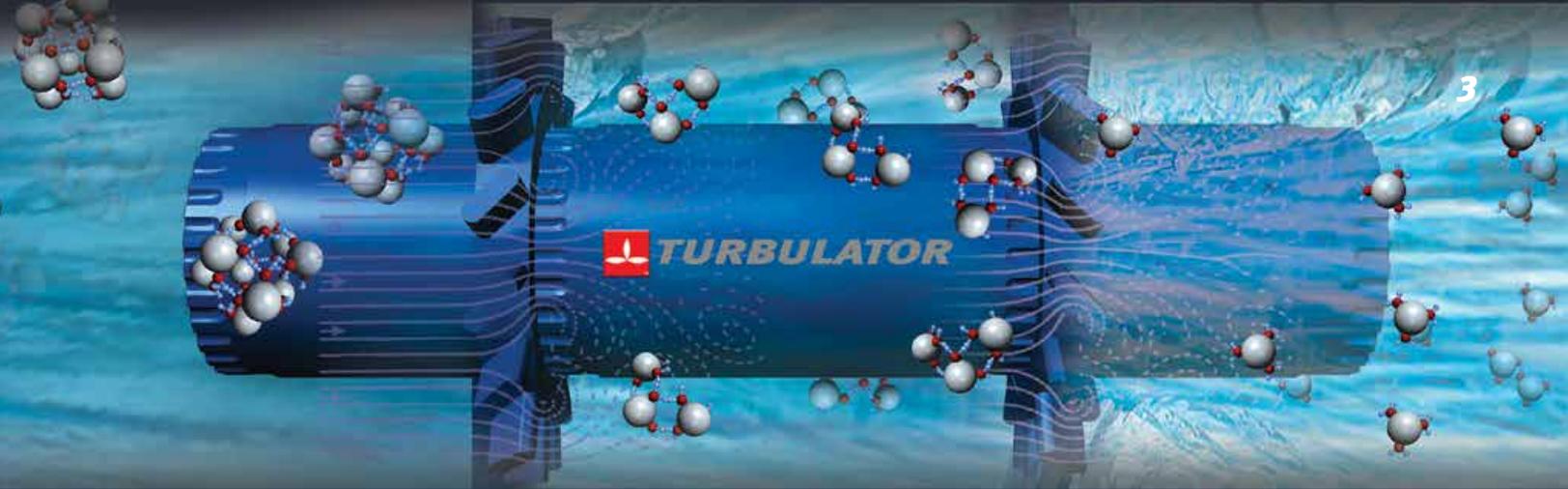
A more recent innovation that is being embraced by farmers of tree crops and a variety of other produce, involves “treating” the water as it flows through an irrigation system. One proponent of using this method is Chuck Dees, an irrigation consultant since 1968. Dees currently oversees 18,000 acres of fruits, vegetables and nuts for the Stamoules Produce Co. (S & S Farms) in Mendota, California. Responsible for the acquisition of all irrigation equipment for S&S Farms, Dees discovered

a product from a company called Magnation Water Technologies that he is convinced is making a difference. The company claims to help growers save water, reduce the need for fertilizer, and even decrease the use of pesticides, all while enhancing the health of the trees. Having decades of experience experimenting with water and soil, Dees thought the Magnation products made sense, and he’s been using them now for years. “Running regular irrigation water through an engineered magnetic force is going to change the nature of that water,” said Dees. “By rearranging the ions in the water we can get a greater effect from the well water we use. It’s pretty hard water, and Magnation helps to break down the hardness of the water so it can be more spreadable and extend further.”

Dees sees the benefits from using this method, especially on problem areas in his orchards. “Treating the water is extremely important for getting good results in farming. Some water is totally unacceptable to plants. Some water is so hard that you have to be very specific where you put it or you’re not going to get good results. Almonds are very sensitive to water that has certain elements in it. Treating the water with Magnation addresses that problem.”

But what about saving water? Although Dees has not conducted any controlled study on how much water he’s saving, he feels he’s reduced his irrigation requirements. “I’d say with Magnation you will likely get better results with less water than you would normally have to use. For instance, instead of using 1.000 acre foot of water to produce a certain crop, you would only need to use .950 ac/ft. That’s a significant savings! Sometimes water costs as much as \$2,000 per ac/ft. So if you can save 50 acre feet, then there’s a \$100,000 savings in water alone. We know we’ve saved water and money using Magnation’s water systems.”





REDUCING THE NEED FOR PESTICIDES

The good results from using Magnation were impressive enough for Tom Stefanopoulos, owner-operator of S & S Farms, to recommend the system to Fresno almond grower, Mike Etchegoinberry. Based on Tom's review, Etchegoinberry was willing to give the water treatment product a try. Today he is also experiencing the positive effects of Magnation. "Where I've seen the most benefit is in tree health," said Etchegoinberry. "Compared to the average grower in this area, my need to spray for bugs is a lot less. I speak to other growers around here and I know that they're using insecticides much more than I do. I know my tress are a lot healthier than others around here; everyone who stops by, comments on how good the trees look. We're all caring for our trees the same way, but the difference the other growers aren't using Magnation."

ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Farming is essential to California and its economy. Unlike other water-dependent businesses, such as golf, landscaping, and maintaining recreational areas, produce and produce-related businesses are a necessity. People need to eat and a huge percentage of farmed goods sold in the U.S. and overseas are grown in California. Mike Etchegoinberry sums it up like this: "If you want to produce crops, you need water. Unless we start outsourcing our produce from other countries, which no one in the U.S. wants to have happen, we can't stop growing them. It's not like the water is being wasted. We're using it to grow food that feeds this country."

That being said, to preserve the precious amount of water that is still available, growers need to be open to innovation and be willing to modernize outdated ways of irrigating. They must be willing to consider new products and systems that allow them to make the most of their water. There is mounting evidence that methods such as Magnation's water treatment are extremely effective. For Mike Etchegoinberry, it was an easy decision. "When I see something new like Magnation come out to the marketplace, it's in my best interest to try it—especially when it was highly recommended by someone I trusted. I figure, why not install it and see what happens?"



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