

# WATERR newsletter

## supporting irrigators in the south east



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### Welcome to this first **WATERR** newsletter!

Let's be clear – with the startling fact that there is less water, *per capita*, falling on the South East of England than parts of the Middle East. Most South East catchments are already over abstracted and new licensing legislation, continuing water shortages and new irrigation technologies are all going to have an impact on your business.



Ahead of forthcoming legislation, the '**WATERR**' project aims to support growers and other irrigators in the South East to secure the major economic and environmental benefits that result from improving their water availability and irrigation use efficiency.

I am Paul Dracott, I lead this EU-funded '**WATERR**' project, which is based at East Malling Research (EMR), and I urge you to read through this short newsletter and get involved with the activities planned.

We look forward to meeting with you at one or more of the many events being planned within this project.

Paul

### **Optimising Irrigation Returns: New Technologies/Best Practice Demonstrations**

Irrigation Business Review (IBR) interviews with South East growers have confirmed the importance of irrigation efficiency to grower financial returns. For example, potato grower interviews indicate that:

*Effective irrigation typically results in a 30 to 35% increase in yields. Improvements in produce quality, as a result of irrigation, provide similar financial benefits in terms of more marketable produce and increased prices.*

There are significant differences in irrigation water use efficiency between growers with up to a three-fold difference in crop output per unit of water used.

These findings are in line with benchmarking studies carried out by EMR in the soft fruit sector. A key objective of the IBR interviews is to identify and inform growers about irrigation technologies and techniques that have most impact in improving water use efficiency and financial returns. The project will arrange for growers to attend demonstration visits so that they can see this best practice at first hand in commercial use.

### **Next Event: 23 July Abstraction Reform and Improving Water Availability**

The '**WATERR**' project will hold a workshop at EMR on Wednesday 23 July. Please come along and hear about the potential impact of planned changes to the abstraction licence system and new opportunities to address the major restrictions on water availability that are already impacting irrigators in most South East catchments. It will include:

*An update on abstraction licence reform by Henry Leveson-Gower who is leading the Defra team which has been consulting on the options for change. This will be particularly timely as the consultation team are in the process of finalising their recommendations.*

A presentation by the Environment Agency and Kent County Council on potential new opportunities for irrigators to collaborate to access untreated water supplies from the water companies.

EMR are leaders in developing new irrigation technologies and techniques for the horticultural sector and work closely with growers, producer organisations, and retailers to translate these new opportunities into practical commercial use. Attendees at the workshop at East Malling on 23 July will also have the opportunity to participate in a demonstration tour to see the latest developments in substrate grown soft fruit.

This event runs from 8.00 -10.45am. To book a place, please contact Claire Kingston of Laurence Gould Partnership at: 01458 241901 or [claire@laurencegould.com](mailto:claire@laurencegould.com)



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## Understanding Irrigator Needs

To ensure the 'WATERR' project provides support in those areas where it is most needed, EMR and Laurence Gould Partnership have been conducting in-depth interviews with irrigators IBRs, to understand current irrigation performance and constraints, and identify the key issues impacting the sector.

Priorities were:

- 💧 Learning about Defra's planned changes to the abstraction licensing system
- 💧 Understanding more about leading edge irrigation technologies and techniques
- 💧 Identifying new opportunities to improve water availability

This research has so far involved some 60 irrigators, covering 15 different crops/sectors across 10 South East river catchments. It has confirmed that most of these growers are keen to be involved in the project with the majority ranking 7 of the 9 areas of planned support as important or very important, to their business.

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## Supporting Irrigators

The 'WATERR' project is developing a support programme that will be rolled-out between now and June 2015. This will include 1:1 support from specialist advisers and researchers, visits to best practice demonstration sites and a series of 10 workshops covering all the key crops and irrigation sectors including: tree fruit, soft fruit, potatoes and field vegetables, lettuce and other salad crops, protected and glasshouse crops, nurseries, golf courses and other amenity irrigators.

By participating in these workshops and other support activities, irrigators will be able to:

- 💧 Understand how their own irrigation water use efficiency compares with other irrigators within their own sector
- 💧 Receive information and guidance on which irrigation technologies and techniques have the greatest impact on water use efficiency and financial returns
- 💧 Learn about planned changes to the abstraction licensing system and have the opportunity to provide input to those involved in advising on the new legislation
- 💧 Have a better understanding of the water supply/demand balance within their own catchment/region and how more water might be made available through improved collaboration and abstraction management
- 💧 Receive advice on how to improve their own water availability, such as creating water storage reservoirs and rainwater harvesting
- 💧 Understand the latest developments in irrigation technologies and techniques from suppliers of leading edge irrigation equipment and water management services

## Further events

In addition to the workshop and best practice demonstration at EMR on the 23 July 2014, there will be a further workshop in the Chichester area during the week commencing 8 September 2014. Further details to follow.

## Getting involved

*If you would like to attend any of the above events or become involved in the 'WATERR' project please contact:*

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To subscribe to this free newsletter please email Claire at the above address.

To unsubscribe, email Claire with the word 'Unsubscribe' in the subject line.



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