



Processing Tomato Industry Embarks on an Industry Wide Environmental Program

Talking to growers and/or farmers – as soon as you mention the word Environmental, they seem to shut down and the barriers go up. It's not until you sit down with them one-on-one to discuss the farm do you and they realise just how much they are already doing to protect the 'environment' on and around their farms.

To supply the two primary processors the growers need to be certified to an industry sustainability program which encompasses both Food Safety and Quality as well as Environmental aspects.

The industry has embarked on implementation of this industry wide program by firstly ensuring all growers completed an accredited course covering Food Safety and Quality and Environmental aspects. As a result growers recently completed the Freshcare Environmental program, with all businesses attending training. This has been followed by one-on-one farm visits to set up records and identify any issues that need addressing.

The processing tomato industry is somewhat unique in that the growers only grow the crop. The harvesting and transport are all carried out by contractors. The rest of the time the growers are growing a range of other crops.

During the farm visits it was interesting to note that once you discussed their individual properties and what they had done or were doing environmentally, the growers showed considerable pride with their achievements to date.

- All growers have installed sub-surface irrigation.
- They were all monitoring their inputs of nitrogen into the soil.
- Most were managing feral animals and weeds on and around their properties.
- Those with waterways on their properties were managing them to minimise weeds.
- Those with native grasses or trees were fencing them or managing them to provide corridors for native animals and keep out stock.

Growers around the Rochester area in some cases use leased land, therefore have little or no say on any environmental improvements they could make, however around their own properties they were planting trees and fencing off areas that they deemed important for biodiversity. Growers in the Boort/Lake Leaguer area were also involved in local groups such as Landcare working with others to ensure that significant areas of native vegetation were maintained.

Next Phase

The next phase of this project will be to address some of the on-farm issues the growers had identified as important. Some of the issues are:

- **Waste collection from the farm – chemical containers, unusable chemicals, oils, etc;**
- **Better recording and understanding of nitrogen inputs;**
- **Energy use calculation; and**
- **Improved record keeping.**



Figure 1: Installing sub-surface drip irrigation