

A fond grower of roses and gladioluses, Syed Ali Saeed Shah has also pioneered the use of the state-of-the-art Drip Irrigation System at his beloved farm at the mouth of Sharaqpur

# No small farmer

By Waqar Gillani



The switching over from flood irrigation to drip irrigation is tipped to help ensure an increased agri-production and stop water pilferage and the fields from becoming barren.

West of the old Saggian bridge, along the rich agri-land, an unpaved road leads you through bushes of red roses up to a decidedly 'modern' farm built over a six-acre sprawl. The fragrance of roses and the dancing gladiolus stems are ready to greet you, amid droves of chicken and rabbits moving freely about.

## profile

Situated hardly two kilometres off the main Sharaqpur Road, this farm is the pet project of the 34 years old Syed Ali Saeed Shah and is home to shrubs, gladioluses and vegetables already.

Sharaqpur is an old town on Jaranwala Rd, famous for its production of roses as well as fruits especially guava, lychee, watermelon,

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strawberry and falsa. Besides, crops of maize, wheat, rice and sugarcane are also grown here. For Shah, it's a labour of love. And, it shows in the way he has employed the state-of-the-art technology in farming, such as the Drip Irrigation System (or DIS) that

allows water to drip slowly to the roots of the plants through a network of pipes, tubes and emitters. This saves water, electricity, time and use of fertilisers. (The fertilisers are mixed in water supplied through the drips.)

In an exclusive chat with



"The government should introduce farmer-friendly policies and laws to promote agriculture and country life."



Lines of tuberose are a treat for eyes. — Photos by Rahat Dar

TNS, Shah says he began in the field "right after I passed my matriculation. I would tag along with my father."

Back then, the Syed family owned a 30-acre piece of land where they grew guava and lychee. Later, the elders in the family had to sell off a major chunk of the land because of the increasing population in the area. They were left with mere six acres.

Soon Shah dropped out of school to pursue his huge interest in agriculture and farming. There's been no looking back since.

Shah admits that the DIS is a costly technology but the "Punjab government subsidy scheme helped a lot. The total cost of the system is Rs1.4 million (approx.)

and the government provided us almost fifty per cent of the amount."

Reportedly, the provincial government purports to spend Rs14.97 billion in the current fiscal year, on agriculture sector. This includes enhancing vegetable production, promotion of pulses, and the propagation of the Drip Irrigation System, laser land-leveling, new machinery, and the construction of concrete water sources.

The switching over from flood irrigation to drip irrigation is also going to help ensure an increased agri-production and stop water pilferage and the fields from becoming barren.

For the past eight years, Shah has been using the

latest techniques of agriculture to boost his yield. He is also always open to new modes of marketing. "Since we are very close to the city, it's easier for us to get good customers and gain access to the market for the sale of the agricultural products," he says.

"I believe the city suburbs must remain largely agricultural. Small farms and green fields ought to be used for agri-products. This would help the urban-based people to acquire the organic produce from nearby and spare them extra effort and fuel."

He urges the government to introduce laws that bind land owners not to convert the agri-land into housing societies etc. He recalls how his family was forced to sell

their land because they had no choice — the surrounding areas had become residential colonies and the environment was not conducive for farming.

"The government should introduce farmer-friendly policies and laws to promote agriculture and country life," he insists. "In India, farmers are encouraged through relaxations in electricity bills, taxes and fertilisers. Not so in Pakistan. Eventually, it becomes hard for them to afford electricity, fertilisers and seeds, which incurs them losses, pushing them to think about other business options or selling their land for commercial purposes."

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