



Popularization of Strawberry in the Punjab

PIPIP Feature Story

About 30 years ago, strawberry was not as common in Pakistan as it is now. It reached Pakistan in the 1980s but was cultivated in the cool northern areas only including Swat division, the most known place for growing strawberries. Subsequently, the farmers of Sindh and Balochistan provinces started growing it. Now a days, strawberry cultivation trend is getting popular among progressive growers in the Punjab and they are earning better economic returns with higher yields under drip irrigation. Drip Irrigation has been installed on about 200 acres for strawberry cultivation in the Punjab.

Haji Saeed, a progressive farmer of Samundri, district Faisalabad, owns 15 acres of irrigated land. He has installed drip irrigation system under the World Bank assisted "Punjab Irrigated-Agriculture Productivity Improvement Project (PIPIP)" on twelve (12) acres to grow strawberry and other vegetables.

The Farm Manager of Haji Saeed Farm, Mr. M. Akhtar has versatile experience of growing high value crops with drip irrigation system and shared that "Strawberry sowing is done at the end of October and harvesting starts during the last week of February which generally continues till end of May. Initially, growers used 40-inch bed spacing (22-inch bed width) with one drip line and two plant rows per bed. Now, many progressive growers are using one drip line for four plant rows per bed enhancing the plant population from 50,000 to 80,000 plants per acre".

While responding to a question regarding agricultural inputs cost reduction with drip irrigation, Mr. Akhtar said that "drip irrigation has reduced the energy cost upto 45%. Before drip irrigation, energy cost to run tubwell for irrigating the vegetable during 3 months crop season was Rs. 15,000 per acre. Now it has been reduced to Rs. 8,000 per acre. Drip irrigation helps to deliver requisite quantity of water at the right time and uniform rate per zone depending on the weather parameters. Although drip irrigation is helping us to produce more with less inputs but there is an issue of escalating prices of agricultural inputs including fertilizers, pesticides, seeds, Diesel etc., which reduces our profit margin. As strawberry is a perishable food, so price fluctuation in the local market also affects the small farmers due to non-availability of better transport facilities in the remote areas".

"Drip is the preferred method of irrigation for strawberry because it limits disease attack due to no standing water in the crop and less humidity, leading to good quality fruit" Akhtar said. He further highlighted that "cultivation of high value crops with drip irrigation has also provided livelihood opportunities to many people especially females of nearby villages".

In the Punjab, row crop growers are adopting drip irrigation as a production tool rather than a technology for saving water only. Initially, the drip irrigation was considered as a better method to save agricultural inputs but it has enabled to tackle water, fertilizer, labor, energy, chemigation and food safety issues which are becoming more important day by day. It is good news that the progressive growers are considering drip irrigation as a complete crop production technology that provides real solutions.



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