

## New tech keeps growers connected

By EDWIN DELGADO, Staff Writer | Posted: Wednesday, April 12, 2017 1:10 am

HOLTVILLE — Just as water is the beating heart of the agricultural industry in the Imperial Valley, new technology and research conducted by the University of California Cooperative Extension Imperial County have become a vital part of the continued improvement of practices for the local growers.

As part of the Agronomic Crops and Irrigation Water Management workshop hosted by the UCCE here Tuesday, local growers had the opportunity to get more detailed and new information from a broad number of experts who made presentations covering many topics including pest control on certain crops, improving crop yields and how to manage water more efficiently.

The main goal of the event is to provide information about new research and best practices to the local growers to allow them to keep the local agricultural industry thriving.

The core of the workshop dealt with technology and practices to improve water management in order to produce the highest possible yields while using water efficiently. University of California Davis Assistant Project Scientist Ali Montazar talked about some of the benefits growers can gain from subsurface or drip irrigation which requires low energy to operate and can be effective to maintain a desired soil moisture level to avoid a runoff. During his presentation, Montazar said that in recent research that drip irrigation allowed for 80 percent yield even with a 50 percent reduction in irrigation.



### Agronomic Crops and Irrigation Water Management Field Day

University of California Cooperative Extension, Imperial County Weed Science Advisor Pratap Devkota shows guests how certain techniques can affect the growth of sugar beets during the Agronomic Crops and Irrigation Water Management Field Day at UCCE Imperial County in Holtville on Tuesday morning. VINCENT OSUNA PHOTO

He recognized that the technique is not as effective in germination and washing down the salts that may accumulate on the surface and said that flood irrigation is needed every now and then.

“Water is such a big issue and we try to capitalize in talking to the growers, talking to the industry about water and water management issues, it’s something that has to be recognized and understood by growers in this area,” said Oli Bachie, UCCE agronomy advisor.

The workshop began early Tuesday with a field tour of the UCCE fields where different types of research projects are taking place regarding new small grains, Rhodes grass, onions, sugar beets and alfalfa.

A tour of the various research projects was followed by a workshop to talk about some of the latest technology, advancements, and research available that is pertinent for local growers.

A renowned local grower Ronnie Leimgruber said he likes to take part in the event to learn about what new information and technology is available for the benefit of local farms.

“I’m always looking forward to learning something new. If local growers don’t keep up with the technology they’ll fall behind other areas,” he said.

One of the things Leimgruber learned from this workshop is how different practices have helped certain crops turn higher yields, something that hasn’t happened with alfalfa — the main crop he grows.

“Alfalfa varieties aren’t keeping up yield with some of the other crops,” Leimgruber said. “We have a lot of work to do with alfalfa, this is a very important alfalfa area, and there is a lot of potential to help alfalfa growers with stuff (workshops) like this.”

This year, Bachie introduced the couple dozen of growers who took part in the workshop to Rhodes grass both in the field and during a presentation later in the day. Bachie talked about its features and how it could become a good crop locally since it’s drought resistant, requires less water than other crops such as alfalfa and is still good in producing hay.

Bachie said Rhodes grass originated in subtropical areas of Africa, is very similar to Bermuda grass in appearance and deep roots. The reason he believes the crop could work well in the Valley is because of its tolerance to extreme temperatures, ranging from 40 to 122 degrees Fahrenheit. He also noted the crop germinates quickly and is highly productive.

“What we are seeing from the preliminary findings, is that it’s a high biomass producer crop, it grows very well in the low desert and therefore we actually expect that this is going to be the potential future crop of the low desert,” Bachie said. “Some people have already begun to grow it in the Brawley area already.”

For the UCCE, the focal point is the local growers whom they work closely with, to get feedback from them, to get a better understanding of the type of research the growers would like the UCCE to conduct.

“It’s extremely important to know there is new technology in drip, new crops available and how people are trying to solve the problems and issues that we are having in all the crops and sugar beets,” said local grower Kenny Hunes.

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