



Irrigation Management Series

System Maintenance – It's not just Irrigators that need Servicing

Around the month of July is described by some as the calm before the storm, though our observations suggest people are getting busier and busier. For those of you who are Dairy farming, calving is most likely only a few weeks away and if you are finishing a conversion you are madly trying to get everything in place before the cows arrive home. Once the season starts many of those little jobs will again be forced from the radar, as the higher priority jobs take precedence.

Though the irrigation season is hopefully some time away, it is certainly time to ensure that plans are in place to get any required maintenance that has not been sorted on your systems completed well before the season starts. Remember a little time spent now when the pressure is off may save a lot of problems when the pressure is really on later in the season.

For the many of you out there who have a AQUAFLEX Irrigation Management System installed it is essentially maintenance free, but some simple checks at this time of the year can ensure you are ready to go in the spring when you really need the system to help you guide your irrigation decisions.

For most configurations of the systems the batteries are good for over a year, but we consider it well worth the little extra expense to routinely change the batteries in the winter so you are all set for the season ahead. A few dollars now will save you a pile of grief if part way through the season they go flat and you have to spend precious time running around organising new batteries and also end up with a gap in your data which is always annoying. Those of you with kids will know you can never have enough spare batteries around the house, so they won't go to waste.

Please note: get good quality Alkaline batteries (not Heavy Duty) and get them from the supermarket where the stock is turned regularly to ensure they are fresh. When you are changing the batteries also have a good look inside the box to make sure there are no signs of water ingress and corrosion. In the unlikely event there is give us a call to help sort it out as we do not want a failure during the season because a leak has developed.

For those who have their battery boxes on posts in paddocks with cattle and have always meant to get around to putting a outrigger hotwire over the top of it to prevent it be damaged by a cow rubbing, remember to add that to small fencing maintenance jobs to be completed list. If the box is damaged it is not terrible expensive to fix as the expensive bits of the system are buried, but again it is the hassle factor you want to avoid during the season.

Probably most importantly have a good look at the ground where the sensor is installed. Make sure that no hollows have developed above it as water will tend to run in and you will get a biased reading from the system. If there is a hollow, top dress a little soil into it and also make sure the grass cover is looking representative of the rest of the paddock. As things start to warm up it's a good time to rake in a little seed if needed. For those of you will newer installations it does not hurt to put the heavy roller over the top, but run the roller down the sensor in the first instance as it will help lower any high spots. If the site is still settling and you run the roller across the sensor you run the risk of creating a depression along its length which should be avoided.

Please also remember if you are on 1 hour readings you should try and get back to the site to download the data monthly so you get no gaps, even in the offseason. This winter data is important as we use it to help identify or verify the Field Capacity which is one of our important datum's when we are making decisions using the system.

Now lastly, people are always asking when should they put new sensors in? The answer is always anytime is a good time as the system will help you with your decision making within days of installing it, but if you are contemplating moving a sensor in permanent pasture or adding new ones to your system, now is an ideal time. Installing the sensors now allows them to settle and if we get rain (remember we can always create a rain event over the sensor) identify the Field Capacity from the level at which fast draining ceases after a major wetting event and be ready to go in the spring.

AQUAFLEX NZ are available to assist you with developing an irrigation management system for your operation, please feel free to contact them on 03 3848900 or visit www.aquaflex.co.nz