

Irrigation well services in demand

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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Work on pump systems deep underground

Unless abundant rain showers crops, most area pivots and gravity-irrigation systems fire up in late June or around the first of July.

And, unless you're a farmer, offer irrigation services or sell equipment and parts, many passersby only see the pipes and pivots that supply water to thirsty crops.

Not the system that pulls groundwater from deep within the earth to irrigate fields.

These wells are typically steel or polyvinyl chloride (PVC) casings, about 16 inches in diameter, that are placed in holes drilled as deep as 500 feet in the hills north of Gothenburg, said Joe Richeson.

Richeson and his father, Jay, are co-owners of Gothenburg Irrigation.

Joe describes irrigation season as the most emergent time of year for well servicers.

Problems surface as groundwater is pumped more frequently and for longer periods, he said.

For example, Joe said one common problem that can be seen and heard is the surging of water as wells become plugged.

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Water can shoot from irrigation pipe next to crop rows or hiss through pivot nozzles as air becomes trapped.

Mineral deposits, such as iron and manganese, are most often the culprit especially since many wells in the area are 30 to 40 years old, Richeson said.

Deposits plug the slatted part of the well casing, which is submerged in the water table to draw in groundwater.

“Irrigation then becomes less efficient,” he said.

Blasting off these deposits with a sonar jet is an option that companies like Richeson’s often use.

However some problems are more labor intensive.

A couple of weeks ago, a producer noticed a change in pressure and that less water was spraying from a pivot.

Holes had rusted through the pump column and water was leaking back into the aquifer, the farmer said.

Richeson said the pump was pulled up from the well shaft and several sections replaced.

In addition to being in demand this time of year, Richeson said another challenge to well servicers is the availability of pump parts.

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“Manufacturers haven’t been able to build up inventory,” he said, noting that many ag producers are investing in parts to make irrigation more efficient. “They have more money to spend to do this.”

The implementation of various government programs have encouraged producers to improve the efficiency of their irrigation systems, Richeson said.

Some require efficiency testing of irrigation wells and also urge producers to plant cover crops, like rye, in the fall to aid in the retention of soil moisture.

Weather-wise, Richeson said servicing windmills and submersible well systems in pastures coincided with crop irrigation system maintenance this year.

That’s because many producers waited an extra month to put livestock in pastures since grass supplies were scant due to last year’s drought.

Much-needed rain in May and June eventually greened up pastures.

In addition, he said lightning from storms three weeks ago burned up motors that operate irrigation pumps.

Damaged motors were replaced with new or rebuilt ones.

Other businesses that offer well services in Gothenburg are Sargent Irrigation Company and Peterson Drilling.

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