Haifa

Pioneering the Future

Efficiency, production gains driving new style fertigation

Some of the lettuce production on Shannon Moss' Stanthorpe property in Queensland.

APRIL 2011

BABY leaf vegetables are being harvested up to two weeks earlier and yielding almost double that of initial production levels on the south-east Queensland property of Shannon Moss.

Shannon has been operating Coastal Hydroponics near Stanthorpe for the past five years and specialises in growing a wide range of baby leaf vegetables, including lettuces, spinach, rocket, red beat and Asian varieties.

These are produced on 9 hectares of red netting ground on one block and 9.3ha of open paddock area at another block.

The installation of an automated 1000-litre Intermediate Bulk Container (IBC) fertigation unit using Haifa high quality fertilisers at each block has led to vast production efficiency and produce quality gains.

"For example, spinach that previously took 4-5 weeks to grow is now being harvested at 21 days," Shannon said.

"And yields of some varieties have doubled since we replaced our simple pressure differential (PD) tanks with the more sophisticated IBC and fertigation system."

Lindsay Rural at Stanthorpe supplied the two fertigation systems at Coastal Hydroponics in 2009 and October 2010.

Shannon said these were fully automatic and each comprised a

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Corey Thompson, Store Supervisor for Lindsay Rural at Stanthorpe, and local leafy vegetable grower Shannon Moss, Coastal Hydroponics, discuss Shannon's fertigation system that uses a 1000-litre Intermediate Bulk Container (IBC).

1000L tank, 25 horsepower pump and could run 10-20,000L of water per hour at an electrical conductivity level of 1.

His watering regime is 20 minutes per block, two times per day in summer; once per day in autumn and spring; and every second day in winter.

With assistance from Haifa Australia, fertiliser rates have been adjusted and targeted to optimise plant growth and maximise cost efficiencies.

Shannon said one bag of water soluble Multi-Cal and one bag of Poly-Feed GG (Greenhouse Grade) with 2 per cent extra magnesium were used per 2ha every week.

"Plant yields have responded well to these rates, uniform nutrient distribution and the current watering regime, increasing by an average 1.5 kilograms per row metre since the fertigation system was introduced."

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"And we expect yields to continue to improve when we experience a less dramatic summer – in terms of rainfall and flooding."

Since installing the fertigation units at his two blocks, Shannon said he had reduced total fertiliser use by about one-third because nutrients were targeted at plant requirements. This had generated big cost savings.

"The system is also highly labour, fertiliser and water efficient," he said.

"We only have to check the tanks about once a week and the Haifa products are very easy to load into the system.

"We maintain a year-round fertiliser diary near the tanks and staff find the system simple to operate because they just need to set the time on the computer and run it."

Shannon said Coastal Hydroponics was harvesting baby leaf vegetables year-round, about every 4-5 weeks in summer and every 6-8 weeks in winter.

He said produce was consistently achieving premium prices at the centralised markets and the company also had a direct supply relationship with Coles.