

Dripping Success

Water scarcity has enhanced the importance of drip irrigation and companies are cashing in.

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Anil Jain, Managing Director, Jain Irrigation (Photo: Mandar Deodhar)

Of the 140 million hectares of cultivable land available in India, only 60 million have access to irrigation. (The rest depends on the monsoon.) But irrigation is of two kinds. Nearly 90 per cent is flood irrigation - where water is allowed to simply flood the area where the crop has been sown. In this method, two-thirds of the water is wasted. The other - practised on barely six to seven million hectares, but gradually increasing - is drip irrigation, where using irrigation systems, water is directed at the root of each crop, reducing wastage by 40-50 per cent.

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Drip irrigation not only saves water, but is also proving a bonanza for companies that manufacture the irrigation systems. The pioneer among them is Jain Irrigation Systems. "The drip irrigation and related pipes business accounts for three-fourths of our Rs 6,000 crore revenue. Water scarcity, climate change, the depleting water table, rising population and increasing urbanisation all augur well for our business," says Anil Jain, Managing Director.



Drip irrigation was first tried out in horticulture, but its use has since expanded enormously. "It has been used successfully to cultivate vegetables, cotton and sugarcane," says Jain. ×

"There has been some success with wheat cultivation as well, and paddy cultivation using this method will soon start. We are helping farmers insert sensors in the soil to gauge moisture, so that irrigation is provided only when it is required."

Further gains are expected with the Maharashtra government having mandated a complete shift to drip irrigation for cultivators of sugarcane - a crop that is heavily water-intensive. "Around 800,000 hectares in Maharashtra is devoted to sugarcane and the switchover represents a Rs 10,000-crore market opportunity," says Jain.

Dow India, too, is betting heavily on micro-irrigation systems. "We have developed tailor-made polyethylene grades for pipes on our INSITE technology platform, which help drip irrigation equipment manufacturers produce affordable tools, double their production, and improve performance delivery," says Shenoy of Dow India.