

New tech for turf farmers

HAWKESBURY-Nepean turf farmers have seen options to improve water use efficiency demonstrated at a field day at Freemans Reach.

Turf farmers saw sprinkler retrofits and upgrades, irrigation system conversions, water harvesting systems and water recycling systems.

“Undertaking projects with these technologies will provide an opportunity for the turf industry to reduce water consumption, invest in new infrastructure for their farms and improve the health of the

These technologies will provide an opportunity for the turf industry to reduce water consumption and improve the health of the Hawkesbury-Nepean River

Hawkesbury-Nepean River,” water management program team leader with Industry and Investment NSW, Bill Yiasoumi, said.

The Water Smart Farms project is working with all agricultural industries in the lower Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment to save up to 5.9 gigalitres of water a year.

Landholders can seek a share of \$15 million in grants, available to undertake on-ground works to improve water management on their proper-

ties, along with some free training, as part of the two new Smart Farms projects – Water Smart Farms and Nutrient Smart Farms.

Part of the package – an innovative new Satellite and SMS Irrigation Water Management program to enable turf and other Hawkesbury-Nepean farmers to improve their irrigation scheduling – was also presented.

The project will provide participating farmers with irrigation scheduling information via their mobile phone.

This project will combine information from various technologies to determine the water requirement of an individual property’s crops – satellite images are used to determine plant canopy size and hence water requirements, and local weather stations are used to determine weather conditions, for example, evapotranspiration and rainfall.

Irrigators then provide daily information on their irrigation history via SMS, and instantly receive a return SMS with advice on how long to run their irrigation system to achieve optimum water productivity.

The advice is based on the farmer’s individual irrigation system performance. The service is free for participating farmers for the duration of the Smart Farms project.

The Water Smart Farms project is one of the most significant invest-



Neale Tweedie from Hawkesbury Valley Irrigation and host from Award Turf Supplies, Frank Galea, with an Iripod irrigator at the Water Smart Farms field day for Hawkesbury-Nepean turf growers.

ments for agriculture in the Hawkesbury-Nepean region.

“I encourage farmers to get involved, take the free training and use the grants,” Mr Yiasoumi said.

“Improving water use efficiency will ensure the sustainability of local farms in a variable climate, and provide recognition of the environmental credentials of the turf industry.”

The other Smart Farms project, Nutrient Smart Farms, will also work with farmers to help them improve management of nutrients.

It aims to reduce up to 38,800 kilograms of nitrogen and 7200kg of phosphorus from entering the river each year.

The Water Smart Farms and Nutrient Smart Farms projects are a partnership

between Industry and Investment NSW and Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority.

The Smart Farms projects are funded through the Australian Government through the Water for the Future program.

■ Contact the Smart Farms Information Line, (02) 4588 2118.

– SCOTT MACHAR