

# PRESS RELEASE

## Less plant stress with new soil surfactant

Growers using the new soil surfactant AquaGro Gold are getting improved irrigation efficiency in a range of soil types.

Fertigation in coarse textured soils can create a ‘feast or famine’ environment for young vegetable seedlings. Tiny root systems only have the capacity to absorb small amounts and gravity soon leaches water and nutrients down below the root zone.

It’s a situation Lewis Perkins knows only too well. Located in the granite belt just out from Stanthorpe, his farm is high up on the hills on the eastern side at about 880 metres.

Lewis grows tomatoes and capsicums in what he describes as a gritty sandy loam that goes down at least two metres.

Moisture retention in the top 30 cm is a crucial component, at least until the plants have established root systems that can go down as far as a metre.

“We’re managing that mainly by controlling our irrigation,” he said. “When the plants are young, they get shorts bursts of water and more often.

“Until they get to the first or second wire the roots are still fairly shallow and the tops have a fair bit of size. You need to keep the water and nutrients right in the root zone.”

Lewis has about eight hectares of crop that he grows using drip tape under plastic with the beds raised about 15 to 20 cm.

He says the only moisture that gets under the plastic is what he puts there, unless they get a lot of heavy rain that really wets up the soil profile.

“We were looking for something that would help hold the moisture where it is really needed and last season we went through the lowest rainfall that we’ve ever had.

“It was shocking and really brought home that water’s a scarce commodity and we need to use it efficiently.

“Peter at Stanthorpe Rural suggested that we try AquaGro Gold, a new soil surfactant.

“He suggested I do a trial block and see how it would go so we purchased some product. Two applications were put on at the recommended rate through the tape and I left a couple of rows out.

“At first I didn’t think there was much difference where I’d applied it and where I hadn’t.

“But as the plants grew and the pressure came on in the intermediate growing stage before they had their roots well down and established, you could see the moisture was more available for longer after the irrigations.

“When we dug under the plastic we could clearly see that the water had spread wider where we’d applied it.

“Four to five hours after irrigation the moisture had already started to leave the top layer in the untreated rows. It was noticeably dryer than where the AquaGro was. It definitely held the water in the topsoil for longer.

“It was every encouraging to see how it went this year and it was good year to try it because it’s been exceptionally dry. In the whole time from planting to harvest there was probably only three days from September where we didn’t have to irrigate.

“The plants that had the AquaGro didn’t suffer as quickly from lack of water. The ones without it would stress with the leaves starting to wilt probably an hour before the other ones did.

“An unstressed plant is going to be healthier for longer and you might even find you get another couple of picks out of it.

“So what we’re trying to do is cut down the stress time between waterings. Less stress can mean less sunburn.

“We’ll definitely use it again.”

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