A FARMER'S SAY >

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# What is drip irrigation?

Agriculturalists describe drip irrigation as a system of providing moisture around the roots of plants by letting water to trickle into the soil.

Some people put water in plastic bottles and make a tiny hole at the bottom of each bottle to allow the water to drip out and to drop around the base of each plant. Other farmers use bigger water containers like five-litre-cans which they place close to the stems of crops such as passion fruit, or young coffee trees.

The farmer has to be sure how much water the particular crop under irrigation needs periodically. It is also important to regularly inspect the garden to ensure that all the containers have sufficient water.

The farmer is burdened with carrying water to the garden and making sure that each container has some water dropping out and at the correct rate. We have to remember that irrigation is practised in situations where rainfall is scarce and therefore the farmer must be sure there is a good supply of water to support drip irrigation.

In their groups, smallholder farmers might need to pool resources together to pump the water from a nearby river or a lake, unless they will each use their bicycles to carry water containers from the rivers and swamps. Some farmers may devise ways to harvest sufficient rainwater during the wet season which they can use for drip irrigation.

The well off farmers carry out drip irrigation with water supplied through pipes leading to the different rows of crop plants where small nozzles constantly let out drops of water around the plant roots.

This is normally done by pumping water to a large tank located on the higher side of the garden to allow the water to flow into the drip irrigation pipes by gravity. One big advantage with drip irrigation is that it only supports the growth of the target crop plant and not the weeds since the water supply is only limited to the root area of the crop.

Drip irrigation also enables the farmer to apply chemical fertilisers by mixing them with the water.

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