

# IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT

## MORE CROP PER DROP

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The United States is a global agribusiness leader: from food crops to biotechnology to farm machinery, American companies lead the way in intensely competitive international markets. A dynamic component of the United States agribusiness sector is the irrigation equipment industry. American manufacturers account for 40 percent of the global market for all types of irrigation equipment and are eager to be recognized as part of the solution to the world's growing freshwater shortage.

### WATER: THE BIG PICTURE

Why is water so important? Water, essential for human life, health, and economic prosperity, is becoming an increasingly scarce resource. As many as 80 countries, which include approximately 40 percent of the world's population suffer from severe shortages of fresh water. Jan Gerston, of the Texas Water Resources Institute at Texas A&M University, contends that users of irrigation water "will find that investment in efficient irrigation not only improves the bottom line, but is a hedge" against growing requirements surrounding the use of water. "Irrigation is the biggest user of water," acknowledges Tom Kimmell, Executive Director of the Irrigation Association, "but we are also the most efficient user of water."

The availability of fresh water has a powerful influence on U.S. commercial, political and even security

relations with many nations around the world. As Secretary of State Colin Powell wrote to the President of the Irrigation Association in a February 2001 letter, "Better management of limited fresh-water resources is critical to the sustainable development of economies worldwide and to the reduction of tensions in regions where water is scarce."

### U.S. IRRIGATION EQUIPMENT INDUSTRY

The United States is the world's leading source of irrigation technology. Most commercial irrigation technologies in use today originated in this country. The Irrigation Association estimates that U.S. irrigation equipment manufacturers account for roughly \$800 million in exports.

Notwithstanding this strong U.S. position, global competition is intense. Intellectual property is highly perishable. Israel is a leading competitor, and Spain, Italy and a number of other European countries are rapidly emerging as major producers of irrigation equipment, as well. U.S. irrigation companies are generally small to medium-sized and must focus intensely on their commercial objectives to survive in this business environment.

### MORE THAN JUST AGRICULTURE

Between 60 and 70 percent of the world's freshwater is used for agriculture, so modern irrigation technology is essential to conserving agricultural water and expanding agricultural production. "If we need to conserve



freshwater, and I believe that we do, then agriculture is where we need to start,” says Tom Spears, President of Valmont Irrigation of Valley, Nebraska. Adam Skolnik, President of Senninger Irrigation of Orlando, Florida, stresses the dynamic nature of modern irrigation technologies and the potential savings they offer: “there is an enormous amount of savings to be had by applying today’s technology — and we’re learning more and more every day.”

Mexico and Latin America are particularly important markets for many American exporters of agricultural irrigation equipment. Canada, South Africa, Australia, and many Middle Eastern countries are also major markets for agricultural irrigation technology.

#### IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION

Irrigation is a lot more than just agriculture, though. Many U.S. irrigation companies specialize in turf/landscape and golf systems. The famous Tuilleries Gardens in Paris, for example, are irrigated by a turf/landscape system installed by Rain Bird Corporation of Glendora, California. Rainbird also supplies the irrigation system for England’s Royal Lytham and St. Annes golf course, site of the 2001 British Open. “Europe is the major market for golf and turf,” says Rainbird’s Vice President International, Jack Buzzard. “Canada and Australia are important, as well,” along with “China, which is getting ready for the Olympics.”

Turf/landscape irrigation technologies include automatic controllers, which regulate watering based upon scientifically calculated plant needs; soil moisture measurement devices; rainfall-shutoff devices; advanced performance sprinklers, and low-flow drip irrigation systems.

Golf irrigation employs technologies similar to turf/landscape, with a particular emphasis on high efficiency. The golf industry has pioneered the

use of recycled water (wastewater treated to near-drinking water quality) as well as self-contained, on-site water systems. South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore have been key export markets for golf irrigation equipment.

The Irrigation Association, with headquarters in Falls Church, Virginia, is the principal trade association for the U.S. irrigation industry. The Association participates in the development of relevant legislation and regulations; conducts educational and certification programs; and takes part in the development of irrigation-related international standards.

Looking to the future, U.S. irrigation equipment companies expect strong growth in international markets for their products. Mark Huntley, President and CEO of T-Systems International of San Diego, California reckons that for his company’s drip irrigation systems, “the global market is growing at 15-20 percent per year.” Nevertheless, U.S. irrigation companies do look for the U.S. Government for support in pursuing global markets. “Being our advocate out in the world” for U.S. products and technologies is an important role for the Commerce Department and other federal agencies, says Senninger’s Adam Skolnik. “In most developing countries, the financing of projects is the main issue,” notes Rain Bird’s Jack Buzzard. The Irrigation Association is also working with the International Trade Administration to promote its International Irrigation Show more widely in key overseas markets. ■

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The International Irrigation Show, sponsored annually by the Irrigation Association of Falls Church, Virginia, is the largest international trade event devoted exclusively to irrigation technology. The 2002 Show will be held October 24-26 at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans, Louisiana. The organizers expect more than 6,000 attendees, 15-20 percent of whom come from outside of the United States, to meet with over 350 exhibitors in more than 180,000 square feet of exhibition space. Expanding international participation — and the opportunity for international buyers to learn more about American irrigation technology — will add considerable value to the Show, industry observers agree. The Show “is the industry’s most important mechanism internationally” for promoting exports of U.S. irrigation technology, argues Jack Buzzard, Vice President International of Rain Bird Corporation and a past president of the Irrigation Association. “To the extent that we can promote it overseas, that’s where we can get more bang for the buck” from the Show, says Tom Spears, President of Valmont Irrigation, whose company attends the IIS every year. Increasing international participation will “do a great job of promoting U.S. technology,” Spear contends.

For more information on the International Irrigation Show, contact Irrigation Association Meetings Director Denise Stone  
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