



Deon Gibson is the Farm Manager for Premium Fresh, a Tasmanian vegetable farming and processing company based at Forthside, Tasmania. Since 2012 Deon has been managing Premium Fresh's vast range of crops including carrots, onions, pyrethrum, brussels sprouts, broccoli, asparagus, beetroot, swedes, turnips, poppies, peas, barley and wheat. Most of the produce grown on the farm ends up on supermarket shelves all over Australia.

What do you like about your role?

I like the challenges that farming presents and the problem solving it takes to find good solutions to our issues. I enjoy seeing great (crop) results achieved at the end of the day.

You have a large fleet of RM hard hose irrigators, what is it that you like about them?

We run a fleet of 10 RM hard hoses with some linear move irrigators as well. For this farm the main benefits are they are simple to operate, reliable and water efficient – the way they deliver the water through the turbine to the nozzle is the most efficient of any of the irrigators I have used.

We have a range of staff members who manage our irrigation program, young and inexperienced staff as well as older blokes who like simple machinery. The easy to operate computers on the RM irrigators are a great benefit to us, very little staff training is required. You can go to the panel and it will tell you almost everything you need to know.

Reliability is key, because these machines are doing 1000-1500 hours per year, we can't have unreliable machines. With RM we have experienced less downtime compared to competitor brands and with the good backup service that we get, our RM machines are rarely down for one day.

The chain drive on the RM machine is great, it runs more smoothly than a drive ring setup. The drive ring system on other machines can be very direct and aggressive and will vibrate when you pull them out. You almost don't want to stand next to one when it's being run out. The chain drive on the RM is much smoother and easily replaceable so you get a much longer life span of the machine. We chewed a drive ring off on a competitor machine in peas last year. Peas can be quite hard to pull the hose through and it wrecked the irrigator. We put one of the RM's in the same irrigation run and it went without a hitch.

I like the independent legs on the squat machines. This is particularly good for our hills where on the machines without independent control often one leg will push too far into the ground where it is soft. Independent operation allows you more control of stability of the reel. The other great benefit of the RM squat machine is that it has a filled in base plate which stops mud coming up through it. Without this filled in base plate a machine can sink into the ground stopping you from being able to turn the reel.

I also like the auto cart lift on these machines, the irrigator is ready to go as soon as the run is finished. The ability to drop the stop bar right down on top of the hose is also good for our hills. Without this there would be times where the cart could pull in underneath it and the irrigator would not stop.

Compared to the older soft hose irrigators the benefit of the hard hose is that you have an adjustable gun trolley which allows us to be able to run the irrigator up a spray run which can sometimes be handy, we're not limited to the set runs as we once were.

What do you see as the future for irrigation on this farm?

We have been looking into replacing our travelling irrigators with pivots and linears but in some cases it is hard to justify the expense

due to the fact we have been able to set up our current pumping system so well.

Since installing Variable Speed Drives (VSD) with phone link on our pumps and shut off valves on the irrigators we have more flexibility over our watering than ever before. Our hard hose irrigators can be more adaptable to smaller plantings. Small plantings are really important to us as supermarkets require fresher and more consistent products. For our small plantings we have the ability to run three irrigators at once and overnight in the same paddock with different sized runs say from 150m to 300m. For example we can set three irrigators going, when the shortest run finishes the shut off valve stops the irrigator and the VSD ramps the pump down to run the two remaining irrigators. Then the second irrigator will finish and stop and then the third and the pump will stop automatically.

With the addition of the VSD and phone link to our pumps most of our watering can be done at night when the wind drops. We set up the irrigators during the day and they will be sitting there waiting for pressure, we start the pump with our phone and away they go. We find that most of the faults that we have are human error, they almost always complete the run without any problems. We have only experienced some small battery related issues.



Are there any improvements that you would like to see made to the RM brand of irrigators?

It's only minor but we have made a couple of small modifications to the machines ourselves. We have mounted the spare nozzles to the gun trolleys so they are quick and handy to any of us if we want to change the nozzle in the gun. Normally they are stored in the control panel at the reel so this saves us walking back there to get the one we need. We would also love to see service interval alerts flash up in the control panel. An alert that can help us keep track of when the machine needs to be greased would be very handy. We also see the differences in the machines due to age or model, it would be great if everything was in the same place on each machine i.e. hydraulic levers.

The newer machines have a rack to carry the inlet hose which I see as a good addition. It is good to see small additions and modifications made the newer models as they come out.

So would you be happy to recommend RM irrigators to other farmers?

I don't normally put my name to things and make recommendations on certain products. I have already recommended this brand to other farmers in the area who are happy with their machines. RM is one brand that I am quite comfortable in recommending to others.

