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## AMERICAN/WESTERN FRUIT GROWER

Home > American/Western Fruit Grower > May 2009

### Strong Roots

A new irrigation system has made significant improvements in a Washington grower's berry crops

By [Karen L. Hall](#)  
May 2009

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Blueberry crops thrived this year for Glenn Sakuma of [Sakuma Brothers Farms](#), Bainbridge Island, WA, at least partly due to the enhanced quality system they now have in place.

Sakuma Brothers maintains 1,500 acres under cultivation including 500 acres of certified nursery stock. The company cultivates strawberries, apples, blackberries, and raspberry nursery stock, as well as conventional and organic blueberries and raspberries.

Glenn Sakuma, who manages the irrigation systems throughout their farms, noticed that the rate of water flow from the irrigation lines had reduced and was negatively affecting his berry plants during the growing season. The irrigation lines and emitters were becoming blocked with iron deposits and slime forming bacterial build-up, restricting water flow through his irrigation network.

Flow restrictions due to biofilms and other materials in the water are a problem caused by poor water quality in addition to naturally occurring slime forming bacteria. Installing and maintaining a free-flowing drip irrigation system can supplement the plants' growing cycle, allowing roots to grow stronger and reducing irrigation costs by up to 70%. Fouled and clogged emitters will lead to a loss of production and crop damage if not corrected in a timely manner.

#### Keep It Clean

Over the years Sakuma Brothers had tried cleaning agents, but found nothing performed well enough to maintain unrestricted flow in their irrigation system. Deciding to make some positive changes, Glenn's latest search brought them to CH2O, Inc. This Olympia, WA, water treatment company offers a selection of irrigation line cleaners to meet the needs of individual growers. Sakuma Brothers uses a certified organic water treatment formulation for their organic berries as well as a two-part water treatment system developed by CH2O, Inc.

Glenn's family chose drip irrigation instead of overhead spraying more than 15 years ago. Blueberries, known to thrive with low-flow watering techniques, show yield increases when drip irrigation has been introduced.

During their 2007-2008 growing season, Glenn found that water flow was maintained due to the elimination of plugged emitters, making berry production exceptional. An additional positive side-effect was that CH2O products were key in considerably lowering the number of pathogens in their irrigation water. Many of CH2O's products are EPA registered disinfecting solutions approved to destroy biofilms that harbor disease and plug low-flow irrigation systems.



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Fertigation

Fertigation is a method in which liquid chemical or organic fertilizers are added to the irrigation water to put the nutrients right next to growing plants. Sakuma Brothers prefers the fertigation process. Glenn states, "We have always used this method since we've had our irrigation lines; it is an easier way to transfer necessary nutrients and fertilizers to our plants."

By using fertigation techniques, Glenn has noticed that Sakuma Brothers also has less degrading of the soil's pH balance. Over-compensating with fertilizer can cause high pH levels, which stresses plants, resulting in reduced berry yields. Sakuma Brothers uses a balance of quality fertilizer and line treatments — allowing their plants to receive desired amounts of water and fertilizer.

Go to [www.sakumamarketstand.com](http://www.sakumamarketstand.com) for more information on Sakuma Brothers. To find out more on how you can assist your plants through irrigation line cleaners, check out the CH2O website at: [www.ch2o.com](http://www.ch2o.com).

Why Pair Fertigation And Irrigation Line Treatment?

Fertigation is an improved technique used over the last 30 years for many landscaping companies. Greenhouses and farms now realize the benefits of applying fertilizers and other plant supplements via irrigation networks directly to crops. Many berry and produce farms have been experiencing increased yields and reduced production costs with fertigation through low-flow irrigation systems. Applying of fertilizers, soil enrichments, and water directly to individual plants via fertigation creates stronger roots and healthier plants.

In the past, irrigation would take up to 10 to 12 hours a day during the summer months, sometimes over-saturating the growing medium or soil. Now, with good irrigation/fertigation techniques the time can be reduced to approximately two hours a day during the same growth cycle. A quality liquid fertilizer and amendment added to drip irrigation water will allow crops to "pick up" the nutrients, and growers realize optimum growth and a balanced soil pH.

**About the author:**

*This story was written on behalf of CH2O.*

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