

Monty Teeter – Teeter Irrigation

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

Let's go to south Texas, where new irrigation technology is being installed in a cotton field. The owners are excited, because it is estimated that this technology can save up to half their water use. The source of this technology is an innovative business in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Last week we met Tracy and Lynn Teeter. Lynn's cousin Monty Teeter is President of Teeter Irrigation in Ulysses.

The Teeter grandparents homesteaded in southwest Kansas in 1906. Monty went to a rural school in nearby Moscow, population 243 people. Now, that's rural.

When he was 16, he met a girl named Becky and their relationship grew. His career began with an irrigation pipe company in Ulysses. He married Becky. Later, they moved to the nearby town of Johnson as he advanced within the company, but he didn't want to relocate out of state.

Instead, from his garage in 1977, he began his own business called Teeter Irrigation Sales. "There was a shortage of people who could work on irrigation systems," Monty said. "People would wait several days to get a service call completed."

So, Monty responded to this need. He would haul equipment, fix gearboxes, or do whatever it took to make the customer's irrigation system work. As his business grew, Teeter Irrigation became a dealer to sell irrigation pivots, pumps and equipment.

Today, Teeter Irrigation employs some 100 people in seven locations across Kansas and Colorado, selling Valley brand irrigation equipment and more.

Over time, crop watering methods have changed from flood irrigation to center pivot systems to drip irrigation, with accompanying gains in water conservation. However, the cost and hassle of using drip irrigation systems has been a deterrent.

Monty imagined a way of adding tubing to pivot irrigation systems so that the tubes could be dragged at ground level, dispensing the water directly at the base of the plant near the roots. He encouraged some of his customers to try it, but no one did.

"I bought 320 acres of farm ground with a low 200 gallon-per-minute well, went out and tried it myself," Monty said. As he perfected the system, he found it could save 20 to 50 percent of the water which had previously been used, at a fraction of the cost of installing traditional drip irrigation. He knows first-hand that it works.

The product is called Dragon-Line, offered by Teeter Irrigation with the slogan "Transforming Pivot Irrigation with Drip Technology." The company's overall statement of purpose is: "Making every drop of water count." Teeter Irrigation is selling its products coast to coast, from Washington to Georgia. Monty Teeter has been recognized as an innovative leader in the industry.

Becky had been at his side through the whole journey, but then her health started to deteriorate. Ultimately she was diagnosed with prion disease, an incurable, non-contagious, one-in-a-million brain condition. Even with her own health challenges, she would support others. "When she heard somebody was having a bad day or tough time, she would send them a card of encouragement," Monty said. "She would send six or eight cards a day." After she passed in 2015, more than a thousand people came to her celebration of life.

Monty is also a man of faith. Perceiving a need for men's ministry, he was one of two who founded the southwest Kansas chapter of Sons of Thunder which calls men to gather for praise and worship on the first Thursday of each month. "My dream is that 20 million men would gather for fellowship each month across the nation to break down the walls that separate men from Christ," Monty said.

His faith has also encouraged him to seek better ways to use and conserve water. "We bring precision watering to precision agriculture," Monty said. "Dragon-Line is the most precise way of watering that has been delivered to date." For more information, see www.teeterirrigation.com or dragonline.net.

It's time to leave south Texas where an innovative system from rural Kansas is helping grow crops while conserving water. We commend Monty Teeter and Teeter Irrigation for making a difference with innovation - and conservation.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.