



Irrigation Consumer Bill of Rights: Smart Irrigation Starts With Smart Choices

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As we celebrate Smart Irrigation Month, it's a great time to highlight not only smart technologies, but the smart people and smart decisions behind them. One remarkably smart tool that ties all three of those elements together is the Irrigation Consumer Bill of Rights by Dr. Charles Burt of the Irrigation Training and Research Center (ITRC) at the California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in San Luis Obispo.

Dr. Burt's documents (<http://www.itrc.org/reports/index.php>) —a general Bill of Rights and specialty sheets that focus on microirrigation and soil and crop monitoring—skillfully guide customers through the complicated maze of decisions that leads to a sound choice of irrigation systems. From system uniformity and water requirements to pump curves, off-peak pumping, backflow prevention and pressure relief, the step-by-step checklist surely provides pressure relief for farmers, homeowners and commercial property managers seeking irrigation solutions.

But perhaps the most important advice—the elements that really put the "smart" into "smart irrigation"—are the questions that guide customers to qualified irrigation dealers. There is plenty of great irrigation equipment in the marketplace and brilliant sensors that allow control, finesse and efficiency beyond the wildest dreams of the last generation of irrigation experts. But none of those tools are particularly smart until they have been assessed by an irrigation expert. The true finesse and efficiency of modern systems, the potential of the tools, can only be achieved when the sizing, siting, specifying and service are in the hands of trained irrigation specialists.

So when the first box in the Bill of Rights asks about the formal training, references and the Irrigation Association certification, it makes a strong statement about irrigation as a science. Before the document digs into design parameters, it highlights the qualifications of the designer—and it underscores the value of certification by our national industry association. Of course, the California Agricultural Irrigation Association (CAIA) involvement complements that, too.

The document goes on to end with a section on warranties. But like the rest of the Bill of Rights, the warranties portion goes deeper. It is clear from the questions that it is important to deal with a full-service dealer, and obviously beneficial to work through a supplier who provides installation, start-up and adjustment.

That emphasis on the relationships between customers and qualified irrigation professionals is beneficial not just to our customers, but to our industry.

In the Irrigation Consumer Bill of Rights, Burt includes a vital question: "what are the options for future upgrades?" After all, anyone who has watched the irrigation industry grow from siphon tubes to sprinklers to today's smart systems recognizes that keeping up with new technology and embracing its benefits is smart indeed.

Of course, some aspects don't change with the introduction of the latest controller or dripper—like the value a trained professional delivers. As our industry celebrates Smart Irrigation Month and Independence Day in July, it's a perfect time to also celebrate ITRC's Irrigation Consumer Bill of Rights—and to embrace the responsibilities that Dr. Burt has highlighted in the documents along with the spotlight he shines on professional excellence in irrigation.