

Grower takes water recycling to next level

By Bob Luder
Senior Writer

Most greenhouse production facilities recycle water.

But Village Farms, a greenhouse grower based in Eatontown, N.J., has taken it one step further, blending its water conservation program into a land preservation program

at two greenhouse facilities in Texas.

Company co-founders Albert Vanzeyst and Michael DeGiglio came up with a system whereby the water used to irrigate plants inside the greenhouse eventually is used as irrigation water for outside land adjacent to the greenhouses.

DeGiglio said the program is simply a continuation of sustainable practices and philoso-

phies that have been in place at Village Farms for quite some time.

"The whole philosophy of Village Farms has never been just to follow trends," DeGiglio said. "It's how we've always differentiated ourselves with our products. Part of our culture is that you have to stand for something with our products."

The system, which has been installed at Village Farms

greenhouse facilities in Marfa and Fort Davis,

Texas, a desert area in the upper Rio Grande region on the western end of the state, works quite simply.

Water is pumped into the greenhouse from deep water wells into holding tanks where it is mixed with essential nutrients. That water is then circulat-



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Courtesy Village Farms

Eatontown, N.J.-based Village Farms pumps recycled water used in its Texas greenhouses into a holding pond. The water is then used to grow prairie grass on the surrounding ranch land.

ed through a gutter system to plants.

The water is recirculated several times, until the nutrient content is diluted so much that it no longer is optimal for the vegetables. At that time, the water is run off into a lined holding pond outside the greenhouse. From there, it is pumped out through irrigation pipes to pivot sprinklers where it is used to irrigate ranch land.

"Through our irrigation system, there is no leaching of wa-

ter into the ground," DeGiglio said. "The water is spread around so that there's no pooling. The water that isn't absorbed by plant life evaporates."

Land that once was barren desert now is lush with prairie grasses capable of sustaining cattle grazing year round. DeGiglio said there currently are two West Texas ranchers who use the grassland to feed their cattle.

"By irrigating, we're finding we're getting (up to five) times

the growth (in prairie grass)," he said. "We work with local ranchers. We don't charge them to bring their cattle on it."

Village Farms has worked with the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality in determining the right amounts of fertilizer and irrigation rates for the grass to ensure it's environmentally safe.

Village Farms will sample soil annually to ensure there are no long-term adverse effects to the irrigated area.