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MULTIMEDIA



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Wickham's irrigation institute to receive honor from Swedish sovereign

By Beth Young | 08/26/2012 5:00 AM | [Business](#), [News](#), [Top News](#)

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BETH YOUNG PHOTO | Tom Wickham with one of his microjet irrigation nozzles. One is installed next to each peach tree in his Cutchogue fields. An international irrigation institute Mr. Wickham founded will receive an award from the King of Sweden.

A small agricultural irrigation research firm founded by Cutchogue fruit farmer and former supervisor Tom Wickham 25 years ago in Sri Lanka will be honored by the King of Sweden next week in a ceremony in Stockholm.

Mr. Wickham is traveling to Stockholm today to participate in a forum during the week-long ceremonies, known as World Water Week. But he'll return Wednesday, before the Aug. 30 awards ceremony, to tend to his fruit crop at one of the busiest times of the year.

Mr. Wickham said this week that the experience will be like a reunion for members of the **International Water Management Institute**, which he helped found in 1987 as the International Irrigation Management Institute. The institute will receive the 2012 Stockholm Water Prize.

"We were one of 14 international agricultural centers focused on the Green Revolution, back when the Green Revolution meant growing more food," he said. "In the '60s and '70s, growing more food was really critical to all of the world. It's becoming more critical again now."

Mr. Wickham, who holds a Ph.D. in soil and water engineering from Cornell University, formed the institute after working for the Philippine Rice Institute in the Philippines for about six years.

The institute focused primarily on growing high-yield varieties of rice, while his specialty was irrigation.

"I was head of irrigation. It was a natural transition," Mr. Wickham said. "Rice is a very special crop. It grows under water. How to provide all that water is essential."

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EDUCATION

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By **Jennifer Gustavson**
 August 27, 2012

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By **Beth Young**
 August 23, 2012

With the backing of the United Nations, the World Bank, the Ford and Rockefeller foundations and board members including former U.S. defense secretary Robert McNamara and an international group of scientists, the water institute expanded from Sri Lanka to Pakistan, India, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sudan, Morocco, Egypt and several other countries.

“It’s basically a research program. We’re trying to answer how to make better use of our resources,” said Mr. Wickham, who was working on his farm Tuesday while preparing for his trip to Stockholm.

His visit is being sponsored by the University of Nebraska’s Water for Food Institute, which asked Mr. Wickham to join a panel discussion to speak about water issues on his farm. He returned to his family’s Cutchogue farm to help his father, the late John Wickham, about four years after starting the institute in 1987.

Mr. Wickham said he’s been primarily using “microjet” irrigation on his fruit farm, a modified form of drip irrigation in which high pressure spigots are attached to drip tubing to provide an umbrella of water to soak each tree individually. He says this form of irrigation, which he has used successfully for about eight years, has been very effective in conserving water.

“We’re going to talk about what I’m doing on my own farm here on Long Island,” he said. “We’re extraordinarily fortunate in the ability we have here to irrigate with groundwater.”

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Tags: Stockholm Water Prize, Tom Wickham

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