

Drip vs Micro: Economic Comparison

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Agenda

- System Assumptions
- Comparison between Drip and Micro Sprinklers
- Something to think about



System Assumptions:

- All data is from 2025 SATI & Vinpro 2026 cost guides
- Comparison - 10 Ha expansion
- Drip system: 1.6l/h @ 0.6m spaced x 2 laterals x 3m row
- Micro system: 30l/h @ 1.8m spaced x 3m row
- Yield: 4 888 4.5kg / ha
- Farm gate price: R135 / 4.5kg carton



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Comparison of Drip and Micro

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Key Metrics	Drip Irrigation	Micro Sprinkler Irrigation	Winner
Capital Expenditure (R/ha)	207 000	184 288	Micros
Operational Expenditure (R/ha)*	189 874	198 849	Drip
Cost / Carton (R/4.5kg Carton)	41	43	Drip
Net Present Value (over 15 years)	6.5m	5.8m	Drip
Return on Investment (over 15 years) #	5.79	5.64	Drip
Breakeven Year ~	Year 10	Year 10	Drip/Micro

*Split in next slide
For every R1 invested you will get x amount back
~ Where NPV turned positive

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Comparison of Drip and Micro

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Operational Expenditure (R/ha)	Drip Irrigation	Micro Sprinkler Irrigation	Difference
Energy Cost	6 502	7 620	1 118
Fertilizer Cost	18 000	22 500	4 500
Labour Cost	20 700	23 000	2 300
Maintenance Cost	6 210	7 372	1 162
Insurance Cost	2 484	2 211	- 273
Water Cost	978	1 146	168
Other Farm Expenses *	135 000	135 000	-
TOTAL	**189 874**	**198 849**	**8 975**

*** Other Farm Expenses include:** Chemicals, Packaging, Transport, Other General Farm Overheads

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Comparison of Drip and Micro

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Key Metrics	Drip Irrigation	Micro Sprinkler Irrigation	Winner
Water Use per Hectare (m^3/ha/year)	6 519	7 639	Drip
Water Use Efficiency (m^3/kg)	0.29	0.35	Drip
Water Use Profitability (R/m^3)	74.15	60.37	Drip

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Super El Nino Looming

What does it mean for South Africa?

- Higher Drought Risk
- Potentially Lower Crop Yields
- Greater Reliance on Irrigation
- Input Cost Pressures

01 Aug

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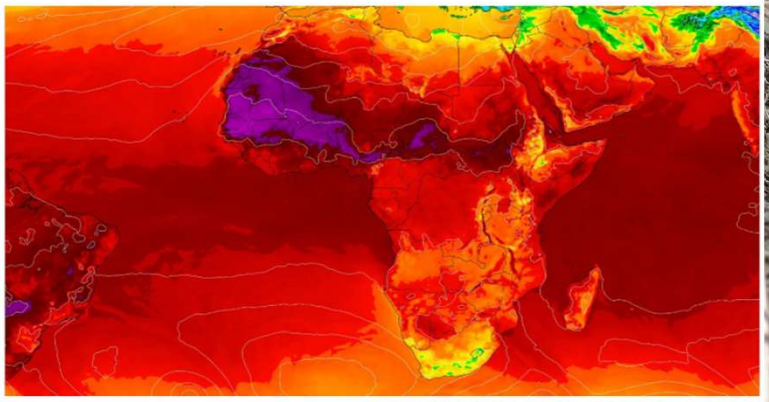
Early-developing El Niño raises risk of hotter, drier summer

BY **Isabel van Tonder** 14 July 2026 12:15 pm 5 min read

An unusually early-developing El Niño has sparked concerns that South Africa could face a hotter- and drier-than-normal 2026/27 summer. However, experts say it is still too early to predict the full extent of the climate phenomenon’s impact on the country’s agriculture sector.

BUSINESSTECH

Severe weather update for South Africa



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Something to think about?

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What if land isn't a constraint, but water is?

If land weren't a constraint, and you replaced Micro Sprinklers on 10 hectares with Drip Irrigation.

- **You could irrigated 2 additional hectares with the same amount of water you would've used for micros.**
- **That is R1.35m of additional revenue per year**
- **CAPEX would increase by R355 781 and OPEX by R326 346 in total.**
- **You would breakeven in the same year but increase ROI by R0.32. Increasing it to R6.11 per R1 invested.**

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Something to think about?

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What if water is the constraint?



	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21	
	Block	Exp. plot	Block	Exp. plot	Block	Exp. plot
Autumn crisp	646	627	955	803	675	607
Crimson seedless	594	519	828	905	858	655
Joybells	593	616	854	756	720	587
Midnight beauty	651	639	722	679	801	556
Prime seedless	754	492	815	492	867	519
Regal seedless	804	540	1002	638	1159	609
Scarlotta	843	634	1084	971	860	741
Starlight	446	338	465	435	552	423
Sweet globe	556	591	620	620	577	391
Tawny seedless	514	498	549	596	587	403

* Howell, C.L., 2025.

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Thank you!
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