Farming Dreams Come to Fruition
And are kept alive with help from Zimmatic center pivots

Growing up on a farm in California, John Diener dreamed of following in his father's footsteps – he wanted to become a farmer. "I knew I had the practical knowledge to be a farmer," Diener said. "I needed the technical background and the education you get in college."

So after high school, Diener headed off to the University of California, Davis and majored in agricultural economics. Upon graduation, he got a job as a pest control advisor to apply what he'd learned.

Shortly after that, Diener had the opportunity to lease some land from the Southern Pacific Land Company (SPLC). In 1988, he was able to purchase that land and more.

Diener's ranch, located in Five Points, Calif., is just southwest of Fresno in the San Joaquin Valley. The operation covers 6,000 acres (2,428 hectares).

On the ranch, they grow the usual crops: corn, wheat, alfalfa and cotton. But they also have a diverse population of almonds, wine grapes, tomatoes, garlic, onions, lettuce, beets and spinach. And there are some Angus cattle and a few sheep, too.

The almonds are shipped off to Blue Diamond, while some of the wine grapes are donated to Fresno State University to help students gain hands-on experience in enology, the study of winemaking.

After nearly 28 years, his operation has continued to grow and now employs roughly 30 people.

Switching to pivots
In 2006, Diener moved his operation from flood irrigation and hand-moved pipe to Zimmatic center pivots. He knew that putting in pivots would be more efficient and like the Zimmatics he'd seen at another farm. He also knew it would be a cost-effective move, saving on labor costs and water usage while providing higher yields.

Diener also said that with pivot irrigation, he knows exactly how much water he's using. Whereas with other irrigation practices, while they can be automated, he still had to worry about subterranean leaks and labor-intensive processes.

"The hay and grains are irrigated by Zimmatics," Diener explained. "With the ease of management at this point – the pivots have it, hands down. The vegetables will be under center pivots in a year or two, but we haven't gotten there yet."

FieldNET is the irrigation tool of choice at the ranch. This is Diener's first season working with the technology, but he has been happy with the results.

"We set up all our pivots with FieldNET," Diener said. "We have a computer in our office to keep an eye on things. It's been pretty handy, especially from the standpoint that it gives us a call if there's a problem."

Diener is also happy with the new technology because it allows them to react faster than before.

"With access over the computer, we can shut pivots down from there faster than we could get out there to do it. I think FieldNET is a good diagnostic tool for any farm."

Control of FieldNET belongs to the ranch's foreman, Jose Lopez. He signs on to FieldNET using his computer to keep an eye on the pivots.

Diener said, "He can look it up anytime he wants – and see what position they're all in. It's a pretty convenient tool for him, and he likes that he doesn't have to run around, driving 30 miles (48 kilometers) or so to check on things."

Best advice
Diener's father, Vincent, gave his son a very good piece of advice years ago: "If you're not happy with what you're doing, you better do something else."

His father has since passed away, but Diener still thinks that phrase rings true – whether it's how he runs his operation or how he lives his life.

"There are a lot of people who have been mentors in my life, and I've had a lot of good advice from those people," Diener said. "But to isolate it to one good piece of advice, I'd have to go back to what my dad told me."

Throughout the years, Diener said he's lived by those words.

"I'm happy with being a farmer, so I guess I followed my dad's advice."