

Irrigation is no longer about yield alone : Frank Yan, Country Manager China, Komet Irrigation

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In an exclusive Agrospectrum interview, Frank Yan, Country Manager China at Komet Irrigation, says Asia—particularly China and India—is central to Komet’s 2026 growth strategy because it sits at the intersection of acute water stress, food security pressure, and large-scale irrigation potential. China remains the most urgent market commercially and environmentally, where government-led water-saving policies, performance-based subsidies, and a mature pivot OEM ecosystem create strong demand for Komet’s low-pressure, high-uniformity sprinklers, while India is viewed as a longer-term scale test case constrained by infrastructure, farm size, and farmer financing.

Yan emphasizes that the biggest gap today is not technology but market proof—calling for field demonstrations and data-driven evidence to clearly show farmers how efficient irrigation stabilizes yields, reduces energy costs, and manages climate risk. By 2026, Komet’s success in Asia will be defined less by short-term sales and more by brand leadership—measured by widespread OEM adoption, farmer trust, and its systems becoming the default choice for water-efficient mechanized irrigation.

Asia’s Water Stress Moment

Asia is entering a critical decade for water security, with agriculture at the center of the challenge. How does Komet view Asia’s role in its global growth strategy for 2026, and which markets are most urgent—both commercially and from a water-stress perspective?

Asia has more than half the world’s population but less freshwater per capita than almost any other continent. Water stress is driven by population growth, urbanization, climate change, and poor governance — not just natural scarcity. China’s water problem is worse than most of the other Asian countries simply because of the high population pressure and extremely uneven distribution of the water resources in the country. India is another country that has a huge pressure from the point of view of water crisis and the need for agricultural production.

Komet’s products are almost exclusively serving the pivot irrigation market, which requires many conditions be sufficient to support the market growth. Pivot irrigation can only be used when the farm size is big enough; the right infrastructure exists (water source, power supply) and enough money for the initial investment. China has all of these essential elements for pivot irrigation except for the farm size which is relatively small for pivot irrigation.

However, the Chinese government spent billions of dollars during the 2010’s in promoting the pivot irrigation in the northern part of the country resulting in over 100 thousand pivots installed in less than a decade. There were over 100 pivot companies in China during the peak time of Water Saving Irrigation Campaign from 2012-2018.

The focus has shifted to drip irrigation in recent years because they found out that drip irrigation saves even more water. The number of pivot manufacturers has dropped from over 100 to merely 11 today. With the fast development of the supply chain in almost all the industrial sectors in China, the pivot manufacturing has been greatly improved, the quality and functionality of the pivot products are at par with the western companies like Valmont and Lindsay. Their focus has been selling into the international markets in the last ten years due to their large production capacity and the decreasing demand in the domestic market .

India as a Scale Test Case

India represents one of the world’s largest irrigation markets, yet adoption remains uneven across regions and farm sizes. What structural barriers—economic, behavioral, or policy-related—does Komet see as the biggest constraints to scaling efficient irrigation in India?

India has a great potential from the population and food security points of view, but the pivot market won’t have substantial growth until the basic infrastructure such as water and power supply has been developed in the major agricultural area. The

other limiting factor in India is the farm size. Pivot irrigation is more efficient when the size of the field reaches over 30 hectares while 86 per cent of the farms in India are smaller than 2 Ha.

Hose reel market in India has a great potential for growth because it covers smaller field and its relatively easier to setup and initial investment is low. Komet's big gun products should fit the hose reel market in India well. However, the biggest constraint in this market is the investment. It has to come from the government at the beginning since the farmers have no money to invest. China's experiences shows that only government can start the irrigation market development in developing countries.

From Subsidies to Sustainability

Public subsidies have historically shaped irrigation adoption across Asia. How is Komet positioning its solutions in a policy environment that is gradually shifting from input subsidies toward water-use efficiency, climate resilience, and outcomes-based agriculture?

Since the early 2010s, China's central and provincial governments have included sprinkler irrigation machines (including center pivots and hose reels) in the national agricultural machinery purchase subsidy program. By 2023-2025, subsidies covered 30-50 per cent of equipment costs, with some regions offering additional local top-ups. In key grain-producing provinces like Hebei, Henan, Shandong, and Inner Mongolia, thousands of pivots and hose-reel units were deployed under subsidized programs.

Infrastructure Integration Investments went beyond equipment to include water source development (wells, reservoirs), pressurized pipe networks, and smart control systems, enabling efficient operation of mechanized irrigation.

Since 2011, China has prioritized "high-standard farmland" construction, targeting 1 billion mu (~67 million hectares) by 2030. This includes installing modern irrigation systems like center pivots and hose reels, especially in arid regions (e.g., Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Heilongjiang). China launched the "Red Line" water policy, capping national water use at 670 billion m³/year by 2030. Provinces must meet water-use efficiency KPIs, driving adoption of precision irrigation.

Starting around 2020-2022, China began transitioning from pure input-based subsidies (e.g., "buy a machine, get cash") toward performance- or output-based incentives: Linking subsidies to water savings, crop yield improvements, or fertilizer reduction (part of the national "fertilizer and pesticide zero-growth" and "water-saving agriculture" strategies).

Promoting water rights trading pilots and quota-based allocation in arid regions (e.g., Northwest China). Since 2019, provinces like Gansu and Ningxia have piloted "water-saving performance payments", where farmers receive bonuses based on verified water savings or yield per unit of water, not just equipment ownership. National projects integrate IoT sensors, remote control, and water metering with pivot/hose-reel systems to enable data-driven water allocation and subsidy verification.

As an upstream supplier of high-efficiency sprinklers products for pivots and hose reels, Komet can contribute to China's policy evolution in the following ways:

Enable Precision Water Application: Komet's low-pressure, uniform distribution sprinklers reduce evaporation and runoff, directly improving crop per drop metrics required under China's water caps.

Support Verification of Water Savings: By integrating Komet sprinklers with flow meters and telemetry (common in Chinese smart irrigation projects), actual water use can be monitored-enabling performance-based subsidies rather than mere equipment purchase rewards.

Align with China's "Green Agriculture" Standards: Komet's CE-certified, energy-efficient designs help Chinese integrators qualify for green procurement lists and provincial eco-subsidies tied to ISO 14046 (water footprint).

Smallholders vs. Commercial Farms

Asia's irrigation demand spans smallholder farmers, plantation crops, and large commercial operations. In 2026, how is Komet balancing product design and go-to-market strategies across these vastly different customer segments without diluting impact or margins?

Komet's product lines are limited and so are the focus of the company's efforts in marketing and sales. Small holders in any market are unlikely to be using pivot irrigation therefore not in client group for Komet. Big guns and sprinklers are the main focus of Komet's business; the focus of the company should be on marketing its unique design around low pressure/energy requirement and its superior uniformity of its products.

Technology vs. Adoption Gap

Efficient irrigation technology is increasingly available, yet on-ground adoption lags potential. From Komet's experience, is the bigger gap today technological capability, affordability, farmer trust, or last-mile execution—and how is your Asia strategy addressing that gap?

The technology is available and Komet's advantage has been proven, however, that advantage has not been shown clearly to the customers. I believe that demonstration of Komet's product advantage needs to be conducted in the market.

Climate Variability and System Design

With rainfall patterns becoming more erratic, irrigation is no longer just about yield but risk management. How is climate volatility reshaping demand for Komet's solutions in Asia, and what changes are you making to system design, data use, or service models in response?

Irrigation in its core should be about ensuring agricultural production rather than simply water-saving. However, that message has not been clearly and completely crossed to the farmers. Helping farmers understand the core value of efficient irrigation and the key role of best designed sprinkler systems is the key. We need to let the data and fact tell the true story

Localization and Partnerships

Water management is deeply local—driven by soil, crops, aquifers, and regulation. How important are local partnerships, manufacturing, and service networks to Komet's Asia and India expansion, and where do you draw the line between global standardization and local customization?

With today's manufacturing capability and the nature of the Komet's products (smaller size and bigger value), localization of manufacturing is not necessary. Marketing and selling Komet's products, however, requires well developed dealer network and mutually beneficial partnerships with our OEMS and distributors.

For China, the existing pivot OEMs are working very aggressively in developing international markets especially in areas that irrigation market is fast developing. We need to work very closely with them in building Komet's product and technology into their overall value system. The fact that most of the developing markets are underdeveloped in terms of water and power supply demands superior products like KPT sprinklers where low pressure/energy is needed to operate. We should focus on marketing this distinguished technological advantage; the lower energy means more profits for the farmers.

Defining Success Beyond Sales

By the end of 2026, what would success look like for Komet in Asia and India—not just in terms of revenue or hectares irrigated, but in measurable outcomes such as water savings, farmer income stability, or climate resilience?

The best success for Komet would be an improved brand image. It would be a great success in the China market if 8 out of 10 pivot customers use Komet products and all OEMs use more Komet products than last year!

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