



Smartcane BMP Newsletter

July 2014, Issue 5

Welcome to the fifth edition of the CANEGROWERS Smartcane BMP newsletter. This quarterly newsletter is your guide to the latest news and information on the Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Smartcane best management practice (BMP) program across Queensland. The aim of the newsletter is to provide growers with regular updates on the progress of the Smartcane BMP program, case studies, useful web-links and a calendar of events.

Smartcane BMP Farms & Areas

519	Farms in the system
32486	Area Under Dryland (ha)
347714	Area Under Irrigated Cane (ha)
81397	Farm Area Total (ha)



Congratulations to Tony Bugeja for being the second grower to achieve Smartcane BMP certification for the Soil Health and Nutrient Management module at industry standard. Tony has also requested certification in the Irrigation and Drainage and Pest Weed and Disease modules. The Smartcane BMP program has a total of 24 growers currently seeking certification in one or more modules.

Smartcane Program Update

Six months on from the launch of Smartcane BMP, a total of 519 growers are registered in the program covering 67,257 hectares of cane and a total farm area of 81,397 hectares. In addition, two growers have now received accreditation in the Soil Health and Nutrient Management module, another grower is in the process of being assessed in the Soil Health and Nutrient Management, Pest, Weeds and Disease Management and Irrigation and Drainage modules with a further 24 growers awaiting accreditation in one or more modules.

The Smartcane facilitators remain focused and available to assist growers to undertake a self-assessment or seek accreditation in the three key Smartcane modules. With growers support, industry will go a long way to meeting the government target of 1520 growers self-assessed inclusive of 380 ERMP growers accredited and facilitate the removal of industry regulations.

Finally, the Smartcane program has developed a record-keeping template to assist growers



Malcolm Petrie
BMP Project Director,
CANEGROWERS

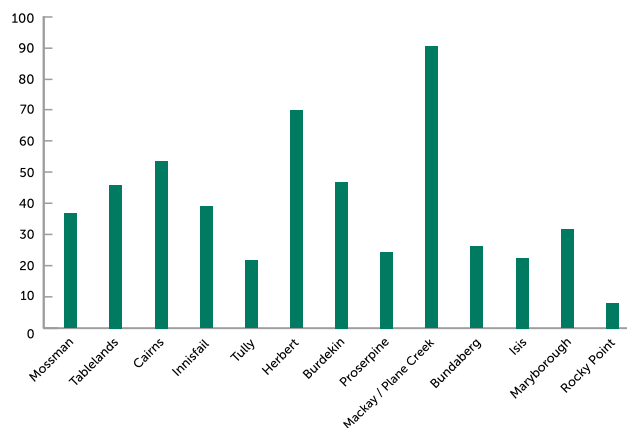


manage their records. This is now available online, is soon to be printed as a paddock journal and will be accessible as a smartphone application later this year. See the "Farm Recording for analysing productivity and profitability" article in this newsletter for more information.

Keep a look out for a full timetable of workshop dates in your local district or contact your district facilitator.

For more information simply visit www.smartcane.com.au and follow the prompts. By participating in the Smartcane BMP program you are supporting your industry in taking control of how we farm.

Growers registered per district



Smartcane BMP – A whole of industry program

With the Smartcane BMP self-assessment system now established and functioning effectively, the Smartcane BMP project team is now focusing its attention towards developing a robust training program to support farmers who are seeking to improve their practices and increase their profitability and productivity in a sustainable way.

A working group consisting of representatives from all facets of the industry including SRA, CANEGROWERS, QDAFF, NRM, Productivity Services, Mills and Registered Training Organisations

will locate existing and appropriate training courses, identify gaps presently not addressed by existing training and develop course-related materials which will accommodate these gaps.

Smartcane BMP Project Director Malcolm Petrie is seeking to work with SRA to establish a Smartcane training program that will consist of two fulltime employees based in regional centres with the role of facilitating training associated with the BMP program.

The proposed training programs will cover topics including:

- Nutrient planning and management.

- Weed, pest and disease planning and management.
- Principles of Six Easy Steps and soil biology.
- Whole of farm drainage, irrigation scheduling and management.
- Record keeping.
- Farm economics.

This process will utilise the extensive talent within the represented groups to develop and implement a training program that delivers the most up to date information in a culturally appropriate way to ensure maximum benefit to the growers and the industry.



Why industry needs to get into Smartcane BMP

By Lawrence Di Bella, Manager Herbert Cane Productivity Services Limited

Best Management Practice (BMP) programs are not uncommon to agriculture and horticulture industries worldwide. In Australia, the cotton industry has had an effective BMP program in place for many years, while some of our overseas competitors like Brazil, South Africa and the USA already have well entrenched BMP programs operating within their industries. In most cases the BMP programs have been very effective in improving industry productivity and sustainability because it has driven the individual farming business to improve the way it does things.

The other issue the industry needs to come to terms with is that consumers of our product want to know that we produce in an environmentally sound manner. We need to ensure that our farming systems are environmentally sound and we need to prove this to the wider community. The Smartcane program will allow us to measure our environmental performance and showcase the positives to the wider community.

Growers who join the Smartcane BMP program will be able to identify the strengths and weakness in their business and then seek ways to address the weaknesses. Growers are urged to work with

Productivity Services Groups (like HCPSL) in their local area to address the cane productivity related issues that have been identified through the Smartcane program. HCPSL staff will investigate ways for growers to improve their farming practices to make productivity improvements and put more dollars in their pocket.

HCPSL sees Smartcane BMP has a positive step for industry and encourages growers to become involved.



Burdekin Productivity Services supports Smartcane BMP

By Rob Milla, Manager Burdekin Productivity Services

Burdekin Productivity Services (BPS) views the Smartcane BMP program as an opportunity for the industry to demonstrate its commitment to farming practices that are both profitable and environmentally responsible. Once involved in the BMP program, growers can assess themselves against industry standard practices. One of the strengths of the Smartcane BMP program is that it is not a test with a pass or fail, rather an opportunity to see where you as a grower

sit in relation to industry standards. For Burdekin growers, regular workshops are held with BPS extension agronomist Rob Milla and Smartcane facilitator Gary Halliday. Three of the main BMP modules (soil health and nutrients, irrigation and drainage and weed, pest and disease management) will be completed at the workshops and there is opportunity for discussion around any of the issues raised in the workshop. BPS is available to help growers assess their farming practices and provide advice on potential changes to improve their profitability or environmental sustainability.

To date, around 50 growers have attended workshops in the Burdekin, with some growers meeting all the industry standard practices in particular modules, while others have been above industry standard practice. The Smartcane BMP program is a way of formally recognising that many of our current practices are at, or even exceeding, industry standards. If a grower wishes to become Smartcane BMP accredited, the process of accreditation is very robust as it follows recognised international audit standards. This accreditation will involve collating and documenting evidence to support statements made in the Smartcane BMP program and means that community and government can be assured that the process of accreditation is extremely robust



Burdekin Group workshop participants Rob Ahern, Aaron Ahern, Paul Sgarbossa, Craig Swindley

While the number of Burdekin growers who've been involved to date is encouraging, there is a critical need for more growers in the Burdekin and across all regions to get involved in the Smartcane BMP program. Looking at the cotton industry, it was the success and very high level of participation and industry involvement in their BMP program that was one of the main tools they used to address concerns from community as well as improve their productivity and profitability. BPS encourages all growers to get involved in Smartcane BMP so the industry can demonstrate a genuine commitment to sustainable sugarcane production and hence maintain a self-regulated industry rather than be subject to government regulations.



Making research funding go further

By Matt Kealley, CANEGROWERS
Senior Manager - Environment

In the last newsletter I outlined four thoughts on coordinating better nitrogen use efficiency. One of those points was the alignment, collaboration and leverage of research funding.

At the Cane Nitrogen forum held in Townsville on 12-13 February 2014, discussion focused on coordinating the research dollars allocated to nitrogen R&D with Sugar Research Australia's (SRA) R&D projects on nitrogen use efficiency. As SRA was in the process of evaluating contestable R&D funding proposals, and as a number were on nitrogen use efficiency, CANEGROWERS saw a great opportunity to leverage SRA R&D with funding from the federal government through the Australian Government Reef

Programme (formally Reef Rescue).

CANEGROWERS brokered a meeting between SRA and the Australian Government Department of the Environment to develop a joint industry-government funded research program to improve Nitrogen Use Efficiency (NUE) in sugarcane.

The program aims to provide a foundation for that joint NUE research program by providing full and improved understanding of the past and current research effort and the available field trial data on NUE in sugarcane. This has leveraged research funding that will undertake a review on NUE data synthesis and analysis, identify research gaps and recommend future research projects and field trials.

The project includes a number of eminent research scientists and acknowledged

industry experts who have been actively involved in this area over a number of years. This includes Dr Mike Bell, Professor Bernard Schroeder, Dr Barry Salter, Dr Peter Thorburn and Dr Phil Moody. The value of these researchers is their opposing views in some areas which is important to the rigour and scope of research shaping the future of NUE in sugarcane.

Over the life of the project, the outcomes are focused on the increased nitrogen use efficiency in sugarcane to reduce nitrogen losses into the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) whilst maintaining or improving the profitability of the cane industry. This is a positive step forward for both industry and the reef and demonstrates that coordination and alignment can leverage opportunities that support industry, reef and continuous improvement which are the foundations of Smartcane BMP.

Farm records for analysing productivity and profitability

Growers keep farm records, such as fertiliser and herbicide applications, in simple farm record-keeping formats that are recognised by industry as reliable. For growers wishing to advance beyond simply keeping records, a block recording format is now available which provides the ability to keep records based on block or farm management zones. This presents opportunities to analyse practices and make decisions to improve farm business management. By recording ALL activities that happen in a single block or management zone together, analysis of productivity and profitability for each block can occur simply without needing to source and interpret multiple record-keeping formats.

The 2005 Paddock Journal produced by SRA fulfilled this purpose. With the introduction of Smartcane BMP and the need for proof of practice, a team of hardworking BMP Facilitators has updated the paddock journal to help growers meet the Smartcane BMP evidence criteria. This updated paddock journal will be available in hard copy from your Smartcane BMP Facilitators as well as electronically on the Smartcane BMP web site: http://www.canegrowers.com.au/icms_docs/187180_BMP_block_recording_paddock_diary.pdf. For those tech-savvy growers, the paddock journal will evolve into the technology era and be available later this year as a smartphone application.

What are the benefits of the Smartcane program for the industry as a whole?

By Claire Bailey, Extension Agronomist at
Mossman Agricultural Services Limited

Smartcane BMP presents the grass roots of the industry with an opportunity to showcase what they are doing correctly in the realms of 'industry best practice'. This allows for recognition for those who are meeting industry standard, while providing an outline and direction for growers who are seeking to meet the current industry standard. I don't believe that the industry is willing to leave any behind who are willing to actively contribute.

There has been great miscommunication over the years around what is and is not regulation. The question of how it should be implemented and who will be implementing it has left growers at a stalemate, often looking for answers. Smartcane certainly is part of a 'bigger picture' when we consider the industry's direction of self-regulation.

The benefits of the program are only limited by how much you are willing to put in. As a grower you can sign up and complete the 3 key modules and

walk away or you can seek to provide the evidence required and become accredited, take note of areas where there may need to be change and work toward implementing them. There are pathways for growers to achieve formal qualifications and who doesn't want an extra feather in their cap?

Mossman Agricultural Services has been contracted to roll out the Smartcane program in Mossman where there has been a good uptake of growers. M.A.Ss is both a productivity services body and a CRT shop so the company sees both sides of the industry in Mossman, the extension and the retail sides.

M.A.Ss productivity services' core business is pest, disease, weeds, nutrition, extension and local research (which can comfortably fall under the agronomic extension umbrella). Looking at M.A.S. core business and Smartcane BMP comparatively we see that there is the ability to tie the BMP in with our current programs. Using the simple but effective system to highlight areas and assist us in tailoring our extension programs as they are reviewed annually.



Make good decisions with FEAT

By Burn Ashburner, CANEGROWERS Senior Manager – Industry

A major focus of Smartcane BMP has been to address the needs of water quality while rolling back reef regulations. I think this is a critical industry-wide issue and we as an industry (all growers and millers and the organisations they own and/or control) must take this seriously because it is not going away. This is the reason there is a focus on the three core modules of,

- 1. Soil health and nutrient management,**
- 2. Irrigation and drainage management; and**
- 3. Weed, pests and disease management.**

At the time of prioritising what Smartcane should concentrate on I said (and I think everyone thought I was joking) that this was the wrong way around and that the Farm Business management module should be done first. If you follow this module through, then the need for constant improvements in the above modules is obvious and critical to your farming future. Your business planning should have isolated reef health (water quality) as a major risk to your farming future.

We all know that for the average grower (there is no such thing of course) the thought of office work, budgeting and record keeping is enough to send them into the paddock to do some recreational cutting away. However the more that world competition closes in on us and profit margins are squeezed, the smarter we have to be. Thus staying as we are is not an option.

Part of business management is budgeting. Cane growers are relatively fortunate in that their businesses, compared to some others, are fairly predictable in terms of when they will spend money and when they will receive it over the year. An annual budget and cash flow based on the last year but tweaked for yield and price is a very useful and important tool. This is what most growers do – keep doing it!

There are however a number of decisions in cane farming which once made and implemented have long term effects and are not able to be economically corrected in the short term. This is due

to the fact that decisions will run the course of the whole ratoon cycle. What makes this even more important is that it is unlikely that a grower would be able to decide if the decision was a good or bad one until maybe second ratoon. Therefore there will be two more years of planting under any new system and the consequences will be felt for many years.

It is easy therefore to understand that growers would be reluctant to change from a system that they know works to one that is somewhat unknown, even though trial work, other growers and Smartcane BMP says it is an improved system. If you are not careful you could have the equivalent of a slow puncture which slowly makes you less profitable.

This is where the Farm Economic Analysis Tool (FEAT) becomes extremely useful. FEAT is designed to be able to build a farm budget through costing all of the operations carried out. That allows for a comparison between farming systems with different operations. Once you are set up on FEAT, it opens the way to ask all sorts of questions and risk assessments from which you can make good decisions which are financially viable.

I would particularly encourage the growers who are uncertain of change to make use of FEAT. Continuously striving for increased profitability, productivity and sustainability is what Smartcane BMP is all about and the grower is the only one who can do this.

You can access FEAT in the Smartcane Business Management Module or directly on the following link:

<http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/plants/field-crops-and-pastures/sugar/farm-economic-analysis-tool>



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