



# Smartcane BMP Newsletter

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## Smartcane Program Update

Since the launch of the Smartcane program on 3 December 2013 in Mackay, the program has experienced strong support across a number of cane growing districts.

Some 361 growers across 14 Districts have now registered in the program with 318 growers having undertaken a self-assessment in one or more Smartcane modules. In addition, the program recently acknowledged Michael Deguara as the first grower to successfully achieve certification in the Soil Health and Nutrient Management module. Congratulations Michael! The Smartcane program has a further 10 growers waiting in the wings to receive an assessment for certification in one or more modules.

Furthermore, to assist growers with their record keeping, the Smartcane facilitator network has been busy developing two new templates including a record keeping checklist and block recording (Paddock Diary). To access the templates click on the following links or contact your local facilitator to arrange a copy.

### Record keeping checklist

[http://www.canegrowers.com.au/icms\\_docs/182752\\_BMP\\_record\\_keeping\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.canegrowers.com.au/icms_docs/182752_BMP_record_keeping_checklist.pdf)

### Block recording (Paddock Diary)

[http://www.canegrowers.com.au/icms\\_docs/182753\\_BMP\\_block\\_recording\\_paddock\\_diary.pdf](http://www.canegrowers.com.au/icms_docs/182753_BMP_block_recording_paddock_diary.pdf)

Finally, the Smartcane program is about to embark on the development of a smart phone application (App) to further assist growers in record keeping. The App will enable growers to record activities as they happen and enter them directly into their Smartcane account. Stay tuned for further updates.

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

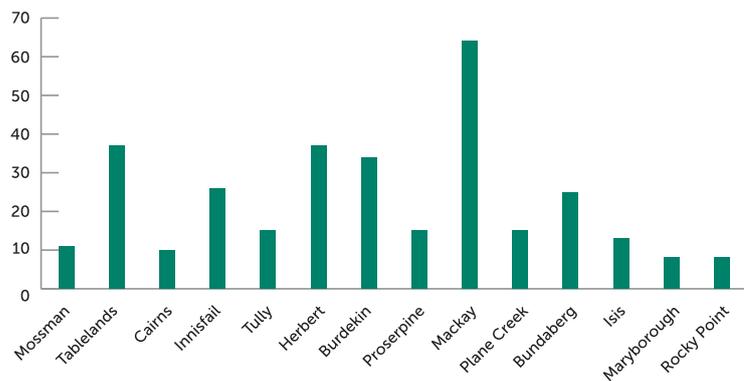
For more information simply visit [www.smartcane.com.au](http://www.smartcane.com.au) and follow the prompts. By participating in the Smartcane BMP program you are supporting your industry in taking control of how we farm.

Welcome to the fourth 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

|       |                                |
|-------|--------------------------------|
| 361   | Farms in the system            |
| 22451 | Area Under Dryland (ha)        |
| 24194 | Area Under Irrigated Cane (ha) |
| 58547 | Farm Area Total (ha)           |

## Growers Registered per District



## A Maryborough perspective

By Barry Callow  
Smartcane BMP facilitator Maryborough

Graham Parker recently completed the Smartcane BMP registration process and at the same time worked through the Weeds, Pest and Disease module. Graham had recognised the need to be involved in the program, "The main benefit for me in this process was recognising the need to keep good records. This is not just for the Smartcane program, but also as I get older I have realised I

have to keep good accurate records for the future of our farming enterprise."

"I don't remember things as well as I used to", he said. Graham is purchasing a lap-top computer in order to continue this process. "The registration process was quite simple and easy, not as difficult as I imagined it would be." The picture of Graham and granddaughter Jess also shows the severely drought affected cane in the background. Jess will be helping Graham with putting records onto the new computer.



Michael Deguara

By Kevin Borg, Chairman  
CANEGROWERS Mackay

By now most cane growers will have heard the news that canegrower Michael Deguara, of Mackay, was announced the first Australian canegrower to receive accreditation under the new industry developed Smartcane BMP (Best Management Practice) program.

I would personally, and on behalf of CANEGROWERS, congratulate Michael for this outstanding achievement.

Michael is at the leading edge amongst our strong contingent of younger growers across the regions of Plane Creek and Mackay, and he sets a fine example to all growers.

It is a feather in the cap of this region to have a Mackay grower recognised as the first to achieve accreditation through this world-class Best Management Practice program.

Michael completed the necessary requirements to achieve his accreditation through CANEGROWERS Mackay.

Many would agree that Michael has always been a stand-out when it comes to his farming business. He is well recognised amongst his peers and our industry as

always being prepared to make changes to keep up with present day farming techniques and industry best practice.

I encourage all growers to consider their part in gaining environmental credibility - within our industry it is well-known that many growers are already implementing the very same practices that Michael undertakes on his farm.

Smartcane BMP will have the skills and every day practices undertaken by cane growers recognised by other industries, communities and governments. In today's social environment we do, as stewards of the land, have an obligation to justify to our peers that we are carrying out our business in an environmentally sustainable manner.

## Please sir, can we have some more?

After successfully completing their grower assessments of the Soil and Nutrient Management, Irrigation and drainage and Pest and Weed Management modules participants from Women in Sugar have asked for more.

More explanation is needed about compliance obligations to help record chemical and fertiliser applications on their family farms.

Participant Paula Langdon said, "We need to fill this knowledge gap to help our husbands maintain the right records."

Burdekin Women in Sugar president Kimberley Mallon said, "The Smartcane program has given the sugar industry the direction to drive sustainability as well as providing the much needed information to get there. Women offer a much needed support role in the sugar industry."

"Many Queensland sugar farming family businesses rely on Mrs Farmer to maintain the paper work as Mr Farmer goes about his daily activities," she said.

Burdekin Smartcane facilitator Gary Halliday commented that, "We have identified a grey area in recording activities on the farm." He said, "Husbands and sons attend many training and information sessions such as chemical application courses but many of the wives and mothers are left to maintain the records."

He added, "Quite simply, we are offering the record keepers a chance to understand how to comply with legislative requirements as they apply to the sugar industry. Knowledge is a very empowering thing. With knowledge comes confidence, with more confidence comes innovation and this leads to sustainable business."

The Smartcane BMP program is about demonstrating how the sugar industry is efficiently managed. Identifying issues to maintain or improve those efficiencies not only strives to increase profit margins, but contributes directly to the sustainability of the farming business.

### Thoughts on coordinating better nitrogen use efficiency.

If you, a grower or our industry were using 20% too much fertiliser right now - how would you know? More importantly when would you know? I asked this question to a few growers and industry extension people over the last few months and the answers were insightful.

Obviously, if a grower wasn't using enough nitrogen, their cane would be yellow sometime during the season. Can this be rectified? It depends on the time of year. The growers also remarked harvest was the absolute point of knowing. Bin weights, CCS, and tonnage all told the story of productivity. Yet was it all down to the amount of fertiliser applied? Did the seasonal conditions or some other underlying issues such as water logging, weeds, the timing of applications play a role or was it a combination of all of these? Growers have a fair idea when there is a nitrogen deficiency.

Better nitrogen use efficiency means having the right amount of nutrient, applying it at the best time for the plant to take it up and losing less to the environment. As an outcome that would mean better productivity and more tonnes, grower profitability, mill viability, and less threat of environmental impacts.

There are a number of products, nutrient management plans, innovative ideas, research and programs designed to improve nitrogen use efficiency. The approach needs to avoid duplication, get better alignment and coordination and leverage resources and funding.

Here are my four thoughts on how to achieve this... ►



Participants at the "Women in Sugar" Smartcane grower assessment workshop with Facilitator Gary Halliday from left Paula Langton, Kimberley Mallon (President) and Marie Hunter



## It's best practice and makes good business sense

Creating documents to show your plans for your business, implementing those plans, moderating those plans and then engaging in informed decision making to modify and improve those plans will help to maintain or improve farm business profitability. Without written records of your plans, implementations and outcomes, decision making must rely on memory, and memories can be unreliable after a few days, months or years.

Being a successful producer is no longer good enough in present-day farming operations. Farming is now a business and to be a successful business manager, farmers need to keep records. Government agencies, lenders and insurance companies are now requiring better and more accurate records. Farming advisors can provide more effective advice if the farm records are available to inform them of exactly what is going on and industry bodies can service their members more effectively with accurate information.

The following workshops will assist you to:

- Update your skills and knowledge in industry advancements
- Create systematic processes to streamline farming practices
- Empower you with the knowledge to make informed farm input decisions.

### 1. Ensure all growers are using the SIX EASY STEPS principles for nutrition as the foundation.

According to the Independent Science Panel which peer-reviewed the Smartcane BMP modules before the Queensland Government endorsed them, if all growers used SIX EASY STEPS, the industry would show a 15-30% reduction in Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen.

The starting point is SIX EASY STEPS. It is supported and easily verified through the Smartcane BMP as it is industry standard practice.

### 2. Alignment and coordination of nutrient management plans.

Growers have said on many occasions that they want to be recognised for what they have done. They also get frustrated with having to do the same thing different ways.

All fertiliser companies and soil labs provide recommendations based on SIX EASY STEPS. The industry has a nutrient management plan template that defines what needs to be in it. These are available now. Let's improve on the wheel, not reinvent it.

### 3. A process driven research approach to ensure buy-in.

There is a lot of innovation, proof of concept, trials, and theories being tested. This is excellent and must continue. It is also a busy space and requires a well-defined process to ensure buy-in by growers.

The validation of this work is vital to ensure confidence, trust and

uptake by growers and the industry advisors. Ideas and innovation that is showing potential at the Proof of Concept stage need to go through a process of replicated trials to provide results that are statistically valid, can withstand scrutiny and ensure growers and the environment are better off from using them.

### 4. Alignment, collaboration and leverage of research funding.

There have been a number of ideas and priorities set for research on nitrogen use efficiency, culminating in the Cane Nitrogen forum on 12-13 February 2014 (see <https://www.smartcane.com.au/LatestNews/NitrogenUseEfficiency.aspx>).

Now and over the next few years, research dollars allocated to Reef Plan from the Australian and Queensland Governments for nitrogen research must align with Sugar Research Australia's R&D projects. The SRA model supports the collaboration and involvement of all recognised research institutions. There is a significant collaboration, leverage of funding and buy-in that can be achieved by working with industry's research arm.

CANEGROWERS will continue to take the lead role in coordinating outcomes around nitrogen use efficiency, research and funding. This forms part of an ongoing commitment to Queensland Government through Smartcane BMP and the Australian Government through the Reef Rescue project "Communication and coordination of activities in sugarcane across the Great Barrier Reef catchments".

## Best practice workshops

Fully funded and concessional rates apply.

To register your interest contact Janice Nelson Smartcane Training and Accreditation Coordinator on: (07) 4944 2610 or 0419 706 506 or via email on [janice\\_nelson@canegrowers.com.au](mailto:janice_nelson@canegrowers.com.au)

### Recording Agricultural Data for better productivity analysis

This half day workshop will cover:

- the process of collecting and recording agricultural production data
- entering data accurately into specified written or electronic/computerised formats;
- storing data in the prescribed location
- formatting and reference to data for productivity analysis

**Normal Cost: \$210.00**

**Fully funded Cost: \$70.00**

**Concessional rate Cost: \$12.00 (Health Care Card Holders)**

### Six easy steps and soil use mapping

This one day workshop will cover:

- collecting soil samples
- preparing and dispatching soils for laboratory analysis
- Interpreting soil analysis results
- Apply the use of the "SIX EASY STEPS" approach to best-practice nutrient management.
- Performing a soil survey, determining soil characteristics and plotting soils data on property maps.

**Normal Cost: \$560.00**

**Fully Funded Cost: \$115.00**

**Concessional Fee Cost: \$18.00 (Health Care Card Holders)**

### Manage soils and develop a plant nutrient program

This one day workshop will assist you to:

- Develop your own personalized nutrient management plan meeting Industry Best Management Practice.
- Collect and compile your soils data, production data and soil testing regime to create a plant nutrition plan.
- Review your nutrient management practices, environmental responsibilities, costs and OHS requirements.

**Normal Cost: \$560.00**

**Fully Funded Cost: \$115.00**

**Concessional Fee Cost: \$18.00 (Health Care Card Holders)**

### Develop and Manage a Chemical Usage Program

This one day workshop will assist you to:

- Develop your own personalized chemical management plan meeting Industry Best Management Practice covering OHS requirements, environmental responsibility, legislative requirements and enterprise records.

**Normal Cost: \$560.00**

**Fully Funded Cost \$115.00**

**Concessional Fee Cost: \$18.00 (Health Care Card Holders)**



By Sonia Ball  
Communications Manager  
CANEGROWERS Mackay

John and Jill Fox are cane farmers at Wagoora, around mid-point between Mackay and Proserpine.

John is a second generation cane farmer, and Jill, while a cane farmer now, was originally a school teacher.

The Foxes, who have two teenage children, are a team when it comes to managing their business.

As a conscious part of their business decision-making the pair recently attended a Smartcane BMP workshop at Mackay.

"We felt encouraged, perhaps even compelled, to attend with all of the promotion surrounding Smartcane BMP and we wanted to have a look and see what it was all about," Jill Fox said.

"Because we both have different roles generally on farm we thought it was a good idea to both get our heads around the program – we didn't see any point in just one of us learning more about it."

Jill said she found the Smartcane BMP workshop informative.

"To be honest it was a little daunting at first with so much information to take in, but once we got into the modules and doing our self-assessment we were relieved that we knew what the program required in terms of our practices and our record keeping," she said.

"We know what's needed, and we now need to get that on to paper – it's not meant to be easy, and being thorough will only benefit the strength of our industry's environmental credentials."

Jill said she and John could see the benefits of Smartcane BMP.

"It is time, as John Eden said in the workshop, that the industry collectively moved forward to cement in everyone's minds once and for all that we are a responsible agricultural industry.

"In this day and age we will not survive unless we show, or prove through this world class industry-developed Best Management Practice program, that we are efficient and sustainable producers."

Jill said John's father, John Henry Fox, first went into production of sugarcane in the late 1930s.

The original farm was expanded through the purchase of a neighbouring property in the 1980s.

"This is exactly why it makes sense as a farmer to look after your land – we are a business and we have to be efficient, sustainable and profitable just like any other business.

"And whether we hand our farms over to our children, or eventually sell our farms, our land and business have to be in good condition – it just makes good sense," she said.

"We can't guarantee our next generations will follow on the land, but all that means is that it is equally important to have something profitable and healthy to sell or lease."

Jill said with friends that live in the city, she knows everyone does not understand farming.

"It is crucial we all stand together to achieve Smartcane BMP accreditation – it is absolutely necessary that we are proactive in presenting ourselves in a positive, efficient and environmentally responsible light.

"We are guardians of the land, and we take this seriously, we have to. Our livelihood and our future generations depend on it."

## Excellent turnout at Smartcane BMP workshop

'Smartcane doesn't look that hard,' was the overall response from some surprised cane growers from Rocky Point.

Matt Kealley from CANEGROWERS Queensland facilitated a Smartcane BMP workshop for 10 Rocky Point growers on the Gold Coast recently and the feedback was very positive.

"The growers expected Smartcane to be hard, but soon found the online system pretty straight forward to navigate once they saw how it worked," he said.

Matt provided an overview of Smartcane BMP to the growers who ranged in age from mid-20's to their 60's. He soon discovered that scrutiny on grower operations was concerning them, with tractor and equipment movement on roads, dust and noise being the most common complaints.

"Even though cane has been grown in the region for over 100 years, the social licence to operate is as important here as it is for growers adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef," Matt said.

"Smartcane BMP can provide that assurance that growers are doing the right thing."

In a very interactive workshop, the growers completed the registration process, received their log in details for the online Smartcane system and then started on three of the seven BMP modules.

The Soil Health and Nutrient module covers fertiliser rates and application, managing compaction, trash, fallow, land preparation and tillage.

Good debate on fertiliser use and nitrogen led to discussion on trash management which highlighted the differences in the growing regions and business models. Trash is an important business component for Rocky Point growers and the Smartcane BMP system has the ability to acknowledge profitability as well as stewardship.

The Irrigation and Drainage module covered surface and subsurface drainage design and erosion management with some good discussion on water table and sediment issues facing the growers. The Weed, Pest and Disease module focused on weeds, chemical use and record keeping.

The growers brought their own laptops, iPads and tablet computers to the workshop. CANEGROWERS also provided three older laptops. All the computers connected to the local WIFI network and then easily logged into the Smartcane BMP website. CANEGROWERS recognised early that computer skills and internet access would vary across the districts and has developed a number of ways to access to the Smartcane BMP system with and without the internet, through offline editable forms and printable forms.

"That's the great thing about the Smartcane BMP. By growers bringing their own computers, they can use get into the system with technology they are familiar with and if they don't feel comfortable using a computer they can do it on paper," Matt said.

Rocky Point is now represented among the 300 plus growers who have signed onto Smartcane BMP. If you haven't had a look at the system yet, go to [www.smartcane.com.au](http://www.smartcane.com.au) and have a look. You might be surprised at how easy it is to get started.

