



Smartcane BMP Newsletter

September 2014, Issue 6

Welcome to the sixth edition of the CANEGROWERS Smartcane BMP newsletter. This quarterly newsletter is your guide to the latest news and information on the CANEGROWERS 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.



Malcolm Petrie
BMP Project Director,
CANEGROWERS



Smartcane Program Update

Over the nine months since the Smartcane BMP received its first grower registration, a total of 594 growers have registered covering 73,756 hectares of cane and a total farm area of 90,294 hectares.

We realise growers are extremely busy at this time of year with their primary focus on harvesting and planting, however it is an important time for growers to undertake record keeping. Recording what you do as you are doing it will not only assist you towards Smartcane accreditation but also prove what we do to government and the broader community.

If you have not yet obtained a copy of the Smartcane record-keeping booklet, contact your local Smartcane facilitator to arrange a printed copy. It is also available online and will be accessible as a smartphone application later this year.

The Smartcane facilitators remain focused and available to assist growers to undertake a self-assessment or seek accreditation in the 3 key Smartcane modules. With growers support, industry will go a long way to meeting the government target of 1,520 growers self-assessed inclusive of 380 ERMP growers accredited and facilitate the removal of the industry regulations.

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.

Smartcane BMP Farms & Areas

594	Farms in the system
36317	Area Under Dryland (ha)
37439	Area Under Irrigated Cane (ha)
90294	Farm Area Total (ha)

Herbert River grower reaches Smartcane BMP milestone

Smartcane BMP has accredited its first farmer in the three 'key' modules of the seven that make up the industry program.

Michael Pisano, who farms at Braemeadows east of Ingham, has been accredited in the Soil Health and Plant Nutrition Management, Pest, Disease and Weed Management and Drainage and Irrigation Management modules.

BMP project co-ordinator Malcolm Petrie has congratulated Michael saying that, by becoming accredited, he has provided strong leadership to the industry.

"I appreciate his commitment and perseverance in demonstrating that accreditation can be achieved and for providing positive and proactive feedback," he said.

Michael didn't have to change anything about the way he farms to gain accreditation; he just had to prove what he was doing.

"The biggest thing was coming to terms with all the recording that's required and the evidence to show what we were doing," Michael says. He admits he found the process a bit tough but is glad he's worked through it.

"I had to formalise, for example, my nutrient and weed management plans but now that

it's done I only have to update it each year. It's definitely not a tick and flick program. The rigour in the program is such that you have to be spot-on.

"I think over 90% of the growers in this district could look through and see that their practices meet the requirements."

Malcolm is encouraging other growers to follow Michael's lead and move the industry towards the removal of government regulations.

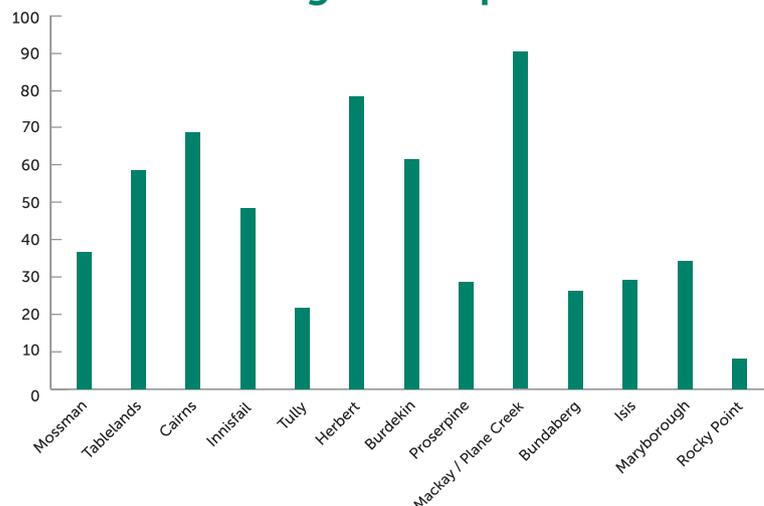
"Smartcane BMP strengthens the opportunities to access additional funding through avenues such as the Australian Government's Reef Programme and it will play a big part in helping Australian sugar meet the future market requirements of its key customers," he says.

Read more about Michael's farm under the Latest News tab at www.smartcane.com.au.



Herbert River grower Michael Pisano

Growers registered per district





BMP makes good business sense: grower

By Sonia Ball

The Cecchi family at Innisfail are smart farmers and not just because they are thirsty for learning and actively pursue new information and knowledge.

Paul Cecchi is 35 years of age and a full time cane farmer with his brother David and parents Arthur and Gladys. Together they farm around 470 hectares of sugarcane over five separate farms.

"I've been working on the farm since I was old enough to be of some use," Paul says. "Like a lot of young men, I then went off to find my own way and did an apprenticeship at South Johnstone Mill."

A maintenance fitter by trade, Paul returned to the family farms around 5 years ago. Paul has used all of his quite extensive energy since the move to pursue an improved, safer and more sustainable and profitable future on the land.

"My dad needed a bit of a hand on the farm and we saw an opportunity to expand through leasing and purchasing," he says.

Paul and his brother David, with the future in their sights, signed up for CANEGROWERS Smartcane BMP late last year. The pair has also signed on to each attain a Diploma in Agriculture through recognition of prior learning (RPL).

"Anything new that comes up that we see has merit and will improve our farming business we like to take it on," Paul says. "One of our greatest sources of knowledge comes from talking with as many other growers as we can. We are always very open about being willing to learn new efficiencies and adopt them, but remaining very mindful of increasing productivity.

"If I could say anything to help convince other growers about the benefits of Smartcane BMP it would be this: Smartcane is a much better tool and much less demanding than the government regulations and there are so many people willing to help you along each step of the way that once started it really is not that hard. On top of that it just makes good business sense.

"I would also say that once you are on your way no-one, no government body and no individual can ever doubt your commitment

to sustainable farming through best management practice – quite simply you will have the evidence – the records and the data, to show them otherwise."

Paul says it also makes good business sense to undertake a Diploma in Agriculture.

"This is not just a piece of paper, this is formal recognition of my knowledge and my skills as a farmer and responsible custodian of the land. I was surprised myself to realise how many different skills are required every single day during the normal course of farming," Paul says.

"Much of the information needed for Smartcane BMP helps with the process of getting a Diploma in Agriculture, and again, it just makes really good business sense to be on top of your game, and to be recognised for those efforts and achievements.

"The more people that take up Smartcane BMP, the better for industry and the better for all of agriculture – we are all stuck in this together to show the broader community that we want to farm into the future and we want our children to do the same.

"We may be farmers, but we love our fishing too and we want a healthy reef and waterways as much as the next man."

Paul says best management practice does not end with accreditation. He says while he's farming he'll always be learning and changing to ensure he's achieving the highest standards of efficiency, sustainability and profitability.



Innisfail Smartcane BMP facilitator Deb Telford goes over farm records with grower Paul Cecchi.

Facilitator helping growers secure their futures

By Janice Nelson Smartcane BMP Training and Accreditation Coordinator

Congratulations to Deb Telford, Smartcane BMP Facilitator in Innisfail who has assisted 18 growers from Innisfail, Tully and Mossman to achieve their Diploma in Agriculture through recognition of prior learning while also completing their Smartcane BMP accreditation.

The awarding of a Diploma qualification is a wonderful achievement for Paul Cecchi, his brother and the other 16 growers who, at a peak activity period on their farm, found time to do what was required to gather the evidence to satisfy agricultural criteria that is nationally recognised.

With their Diploma of Agriculture in the bag, we now look forward to acknowledging these farmers with their accreditation in the Smartcane BMP core modules.



Paul Cecchi says the Diploma in Agriculture is recognition for his knowledge and skills as a farmer.



Tully Sugar farms seek accreditation

Tully Sugar Limited has signed its 1,750 hectares of sugarcane farmland up to Smartcane BMP and is encouraging the district's growers to do the same.

The driving force behind this effort is Greg Shannon, Tully Sugar's enthusiastic Cane Productivity Manager. He believes Smartcane BMP is a way of looking at the triple bottom line of farming - productivity, profitability and sustainability to ensure that not only farmers but the whole value chain benefits.

"We are in a unique position as an industry, I think, to self-manage through the BMP system and I am lucky to have this job, working with growers and our own farming operation to seek continuous improvement," Greg says.

Tully Sugar's farms are spread from Murray to Silkwood and have expanded by around 500 hectares since 2012. They're currently in the process of being accredited.

Part of Greg's role is to assist the farm management with crop nutrition issues, record keeping, weed management and variety selection.

Along with his responsibilities as Tully Sugar Limited Cane Productivity Manager, Greg assists all interested individual Tully growers who supply the mill with improving productivity and cane quality, expansion, variety selection, soil health / nutrition, pest and disease management and drainage issues. He also manages the Tully Variety Adoption group which works to fine tune of new SRA varieties before

and after they're released, investigating CCS curve trends, germination rates and herbicide tolerance.

Sustainability is a key part of Greg's role. "I'm a firm believer that soil health maintenance is vital for our future and that water quality and issues like nitrogen levels (DIN) should be about the whole productivity story," he says.

"Issues like drainage, variety selection, soil type, pest and disease management all need to be considered, along with fertiliser rates and placement and these all fit into the Smartcane BMP programme.

"Any close look at productivity should include sustainability because we are here for the long haul, so going through the BMP process should allow a grower to take a long range view of their operation."



Tully Sugar Cane Productivity Manager Greg Shannon goes over a Farm Productivity Review with local grower Chris Condon.

Greg uses a system called Farm Productivity Review to sit down with growers and work through those key areas to come up with a series of recommendations for variety choice, soil health and further work, whether to it is on farm trial work or chasing up information from Sugar Research Australia.

Local grower and CANEGROWERS Tully Director Chris Condon was the first of the Tully growers to use the review service and is also working towards Smartcane BMP accreditation.

Maryborough Sugar Factory and Smartcane BMP

MSF General Manager-Agriculture Trevor Crook has confirmed the company's farm supervisors will register for Smartcane BMP and work through the three key modules of the program.

MSF is a major sugarcane producer as well as a milling company with operations in a number of key areas in coastal Queensland. With increasing environmental concerns and scrutiny of agriculture along the coast, MSF management has decided to take a pro-active approach.

"As a large scale land manager, our challenges and opportunities will lie in developing an effective system which will assist us to improve our farm management for consistently high crop production within the Smartcane BMP guidelines," Trevor says.

"Historically we have not been as good as we could be with regard to keeping accurate records - the growers know what happens and operations are carried out in a timely and responsible way but the recording was not being done all the time for various reasons. With the new Smartcane block record keeping booklet the supervisors find the task that much easier."

Tony Coutts-Smith, Operations Manager - Maryborough Farms added that Smartcane forces a focus on each component of the program and helps develop a better way of farming.

"We felt it was a great way of measuring ourselves against the standard. Most farmers do well in most areas of cane farming, but there are usually gaps," he says.



MSF Agricultural Administrator Lisa Waterson collates farm records with Operations Manager Tony Coutts-Smith



What Atherton Tableland growers think of Smartcane BMP program

John Vilella – Walkamin

“As a young grower in the industry my expectation is that BMP will assist in the future of the sugar industry by having good record keeping practices which is good for individual growers. It will provide transparency which will give the community, outside interest groups and growers themselves confidence in sustainability. By having a BMP system, I am better able to scrutinise my practices which in turn will help me better manage my productivity and profitability as well as the environmental impacts.”

Vince Cabassi – Chewko

“Embarking on an industry BMP program will give me the motivation to implement record keeping as another farm management activity. I think benchmarking is important so I will be looking to the BMP process to be able to do that – initially within our own farms. I’m also looking to BMP to have access to industry information and training to be able to improve our practices and in turn achieve better economic returns. With BMP, the industry can coordinate information and accurately communicate this across the industry and the community as required.”

Ian Poggioli – Atherton Tableland Seed - Tolga

“As new growers in the cane industry, we understand the importance of adopting and maintaining industry standards. We

see the Smartcane BMP program being a catalyst to improve our farming procedures and techniques. Improvements can be difficult to measure and track unless adequate records are kept and the BMP program will be a great tool to help us manage our progress. We already comply with another QA program for other crops but it does not have the sophistication of an online program.”

John Barbetti - Facilitator View

Approximately 57 growers now have registered with Smartcane BMP on the Tableland. In the registration process (one-on-one) I was able to truly gauge growers’ initial reactions and observe their capacity to understand what the sugar industry is embarking on.

Once the purpose of the BMP program was explained, particularly the benefits to them and the industry, growers demonstrated a sound capacity to understand the importance of the BMP program.

BMP is also bringing an awareness that the practice of recording keeping is an important farm management activity.

The full realisation of how the BMP program will benefit them into the future will evolve as growers become more hands on and actually use the resources of BMP. To achieve this level of BMP utilisation, growers will require leadership from all levels along with facilitator support.



Chewko grower Vince Cabassi with Tableland Smartcane BMP facilitator John Barbetti.

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