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Ravensdown target 100,000 launched

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Mackay region grower Ian Stevenson has supported Ravensdown since its introduction to the Queensland market and urges other growers to do the same. Photo by Sonia Ball.

Ron Mullins
CANEGROWERS
Acting CEO

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This fortnight we received some good news for the southern sugar industry, with the announcement that funding would be approved for dredging in the Port of Bundaberg. Without the dredging, the sugar industry would be facing continued, costly transportation of sugar to Mackay port for export.

Southern region growers would also like to hear that the deadline for NDDRA assistance has been extended to 29 November. This is good news for those growers affected by flooding earlier in the year who have not had time to apply for assistance.

Our cover story this edition is all about Ravensdown and the success had in the Mackay region with the Target 10,000 program. More than ever, growers have been urged to support Ravensdown to ensure its place is firmly cemented in our industry. On the back of this successful campaign, CANEGROWERS is launching a target 100,000 campaign state wide. Read more on page 6.

While farming, Horace was a founding member of the Gordonvale Junior Farmers, served with honour on the Local Board and was a central catalyst for the Inter-Area Cane Grower’s Action Group aiming for a better deal and cooperation for sugarcane farmers as far south as Mackay.

He knew how to husband the land into peak returns, achieving both the “Most Improved” Awards for production and productivity in the same year. Farming in the Babinda Mill area was not easy with high rainfall, low prices and cultivating or harvesting in less than optimum conditions. However, he expanded and because of limited funds did much of the physical clearing by hand himself.

Horace will be sadly missed by his family, including three children, seven grandchildren and five great grandchildren.

Jasmine Hunt

Vale: Horace Reghenzani

Babinda grower Horace Reghenzani passed away in late April this year. Born in Gordonvale to Boni and Maria of Italian origin, on the 20 May 1927, Oreste (Horace) Reghenzani was their third son and he grew up on their sugarcane farm, attended Meerawa State School, St Augustine’s College in Cairns and Gatton Agricultural College (QAC, known then as the Queensland Agricultural High School and College, now the University of Queensland) achieving his Diploma.

Horace and Mary Poglio married in Gordonvale on 12 February 1949. First, Horace co-managed the family farm at Mt Sophia, then managed the family general store at Werribee South (Victoria), before purchasing and moving to their own cane farm at Fig Tree Creek Bruce Highway.

CropCare have announced the release of a new fungicide, Sinker®, for the prevention of pineapple disease and smut in sugarcane planting material.

BSES Limited has said this product does not replace smut-resistant varieties, and should not be used as a management tool to protect intermediate varieties against smut.

The active ingredient is flutriafol 500g/L.

Information supplied by Ravensdown Fertiliser Australia.

Golden tips

New fungicide for Pineapple disease and Smut control

World Fertiliser Price Update

DAP pricing - $USD*

Potassium Chloride pricing - $USD

Urea pricing - $USD

Australian Canegrower | 5 August 2013

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What does your plan for the future of your farming enterprise look like?

By CANEGROWERS
Acting CEO,
Ron Mullins

CANEGROWERS, along with our industry partners, are developing a 30 year plan which will provide input into the Queensland Government’s vision to double agricultural production by 2040. Proposals for the development of Queensland’s agricultural potential are surfacing and follow the intense interest from domestic and overseas investors in the next phase of the Ord River agricultural development.

Given our strategic location to the East Asian market there are many challenges and opportunities ahead for Queensland’s regional and rural communities. Climate change and volatility sit on one hand, while world population growth and demand for food are on the other.

CANEGROWERS identified in its 2013-18 strategic plan the need to focus on cane growers’ input-cost environment, and CANEGROWERS continues to influence the major costs of production for the sugarcane industry, to achieve sustainability and profitability for our members.

In order to deliver on the doubling of agricultural production by 2040, we need the government’s support to deliver electricity and water at affordable prices. Negotiated smaller price increases in electricity costs, and the commitment from the Queensland Government to work closely with CANEGROWERS on future electricity and water pricing is a very positive step forward. Regular meetings with Energy and Water Supply Minister Mark McArdle are taking place, with the aim to arrive at a mutually agreeable position on these costs.

Ravensdown is a success story on how industry action and unity can affect input costs in a positive way. Support Ravensdown and you will receive the benefit of competitive fertiliser prices as a farmer-owner of the fertiliser cooperative, in addition to the benefit of rebates when Ravensdown achieves a profit. Growers should participate in their district’s targeted sales for Ravensdown to ensure that everyone benefits from real competition in the market place.

Following Tropical Cyclone Yasi in 2011 when many insurance companies decided to exit the north Queensland market due to huge underwriting losses, CANEGROWERS launched an insurance service in July 2012 to ensure members had access to professional advice and assistance in identifying and covering risks for themselves, family members and their business needs.

CANEGROWERS employs professional and qualified insurance brokers who provide independent advice to members.

Following the flooding events in the Wide-Bay region earlier this year, CANEGROWERS was involved in claims processing to ensure that those impacted were not delayed in receiving their insurance benefits. Once again this service will not be successful without the support of growers and we urge you to seek a quote from your CANEGROWERS Insurance Regional Manager before your insurance cover requires review and renewal.

CANEGROWERS is concerned however at the exodus of insurance companies from the market and is in discussions with government to seek a long term solution. The huge increases in insurance premiums and the exodus from the market effects not only the sugarcane industry but other primary producers and rural and regional communities throughout Queensland.

CANEGROWERS is seeking government assistance to ensure that all Queenslanders have access to competitively priced insurance irrespective of their location.

This past month has seen much activity in lobbying both Queensland and federal governments for the restoration of the Port of Bundaberg to pre-flood conditions. While some initial restoration work had occurred, the size of the ships moving sugar from the port was restricted and had cost the industry well in excess of $6 million for the year to date.

The port is government infrastructure and unnecessary delays in the restoration were of major concern to industry stakeholders. The announcement of funding on 24 July came as a great relief and will contribute to the completion of the restoration works.

The Queensland sugar industry has valuable infrastructure which will only enhance our future prospects to increase trade within the Asian region.

---

We’ve always made special blends for cane growers
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We’ve been helping identify the specific needs of cane growers like you, and producing special blends to meet them, for decades. Sugar…it’s in our blood.
The sugarcane industry is breathing a collective sigh of relief as the federal government announced much needed disaster assistance to restore the Port of Bundaberg to pre-flood conditions.

The industry was in dire straits with sugar storage at the terminals filled to overflowing with last year’s sugar. Small vessels have been contracted to move the sugar, at a cost of millions of dollars, to make room for the new season’s harvest.

Split funding arrangement between federal and Queensland governments will enable vital work to clear silt from the flood damaged Port of Bundaberg to progress. Once completed, ships up to 30,000 tonne capacity will once again berth at the Port to load sugar destined for export markets.

CANEGROWERS said the industry is looking forward to getting the port back to a fully functional state, and recommencing direct sugar exports from Bundaberg.

CANEGROWERS has welcomed the Queensland Government’s extension to the deadline for Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) assistance to 29 November.

This means that flood affected growers are able to apply for Category C and Category D assistance beyond the 30 August deadline.

CANEGROWERS had applied to the Queensland Government for more time for farmers to access the disaster assistance program saying there was still much work ahead before farmers were on their feet.

“The clean-up was extensive and more time was essential to ensure it was able to be done right,” CANEGROWERS Acting CEO, Ron Mullins said.

In announcing the extension, Minister John McVeigh recognised that many Bundaberg, Isis and Maryborough farmers were struggling to complete repair and recovery activities before the start of the next wet season.

Category C assistance provides clean-up and recovery grants for primary producers and small businesses up to $25,000.

Category D provides access to concessional loans up to $650,000, including a 25% grant component to a maximum of $50,000. Repayments and interest on these loans do not start until the third year of the loan at an interest rate of 1.7%.

Primary producers, small businesses and not for profit organisations have been urged to keep all receipts and invoices of expenditure and contact QRAA on 1800 623 946 to discuss eligibility.

CANEGROWERS also reminded growers that 16 Industry Recovery Officers have been deployed throughout Queensland to assist farmers wherever possible.

The Queensland Farmers’ Federation had partnered with industry groups and the Queensland and federal governments on this initiative, and growers can access IROs by calling QFF on 07 3837 4747.

Wilmar has advised that Craig Doyle, Executive General Manager of Cane Products and Group Technical Head – Sugar, has resigned from his position effective mid-September.

Mr Doyle has worked within the sugar industry for nearly 30 years, and has decided to take on a new challenge outside the industry.

Wilmar said they will announce plans in coming weeks for replacing Mr Doyle’s role in north Queensland.

Craig Doyle resigns from Wilmar

Mackay Sugar was inducted into the prestigious Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame last fortnight.

The award was in recognition of its ‘contribution to the state’s reputation and economy despite its 150-year long battle to survive and thrive in the highly volatile sugar market’.

The Queensland Business Leaders Hall of Fame was established in 2009 by Queensland University of Technology’s Business School, State Library of Queensland and Queensland Library Foundation.

Inductees were presented by Governor of Queensland Penelope Wensley at a capacity black-tie gala event, held at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre’s Plaza Ballroom.

Mackay Sugar Chairman Andrew Cappello said he was extremely proud to accept the award on behalf of the company and stated the achievement showcased Mackay Sugar’s resilient and cohesive approach to agribusiness.

“This is a result of the hard work and determination of our former and current growers, shareholders, Board Directors, management and employees,” he said.

Mackay Sugar recognised as Qld business leader

Queensland Governor Penelope Wensley, Andrew Capello and John Allpass.
Software upgrade delivers more features for Queensland cane farmers

Free farm enterprise software created by Queensland Government economists has been upgraded with new features to assist cane farmers exploring options for their enterprises.

The Farm Economic Analysis Tool (FEAT) has been created to assist business decision-making by Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry economists. It’s a computer program written specifically for evaluating cane farm enterprises.

DAFF economist Matthew Thompson said FEAT was designed to evaluate profitability on a whole-of-farm basis.

“FEAT is useful to determine the farm gross margin, farm operating return and return on investment based on specific production information entered by the grower,” he said.

“FEAT calculates machinery costs (tractors and implements), fertiliser and herbicide management costs as well as farm labour requirements and can be used to measure the economic implications when considering whether to make changes to current farming practices.”

Mr Thompson said more than 100 people in the sugarcane industry register to use FEAT each year, and their feedback had been considered when developing the new software upgrades.

He said FEAT has some new features to provide additional information and make the program easier to use, including:

• Labour Planning Calculator – helps to calculate weekly and monthly labour demands, as well as showing you how much time is spent doing different types of jobs.

• Cane Flows and Cane Pays – another consideration before changing a farming system is whether or not financial obligations can be met throughout the year. This allows you to identify budget deficits and surpluses in cash throughout the year.

• Streamlined transfer of operation costs – transfer operation costs directly from the “Machinery Costs Sheet” to the “Growing Expenses Sheet” via a single button.

• Sugar Pricing – with growers having the option to price a portion of their own sugar, included is a calculator to test the options you have available.

• Standard and Mackay version – regionalised versions have recently been developed for use by Mackay regions.

To register for FEAT, potential users should first download a copy of the program from the DAFF website, www.daff.qld.gov.au. Once downloaded, follow the prompts to request a password that will be accessed via email. Once the password is entered, the software is ready for use.

DAFF economists Matthew Thompson and Alison Collier are available to assist FEAT users. Contact them on 07 4760 1600 or email matthew.thompson@daff.qld.gov.au or alison.collier@daff.qld.gov.au.

For more information contact Malcolm Petrie on 07 3864 6444 or malcolm_petrie@canegrowers.com.au.
Ravensdown tonnage success in Mackay must be mirrored across State

By Jasmine Hunt

Like many long-term sugarcane growers, Mackay grower Ian Stevenson shudders to think about what fertiliser prices were like prior to Ravensdown entering the Queensland market.

“The high prices for fertiliser came at a time when we also were experiencing the lowest price for sugar,” he said.

“It started off at say $700 per tonne, then within three months it was heading towards $1400.”

It was the simply scandalous pricing issues during the late 2000s that led to Ian welcoming and whole-heartedly supporting the introduction of Ravensdown to the Queensland fertiliser market by CANEGROWERS.

“Ravensdown has been in our shed ever since CANEGROWERS introduced it to the market,” Ian said.

“To me, it’s a no-brainer. They’re committed to farmers, and we always know they’re giving it to us at the lowest price possible.

“Fertiliser is the highest-cost input on our farm, so we need to keep it sustainable; we need to know our input costs.

“Since we’ve had Ravensdown in the market, the price has only reduced. This year is the lowest price I’ve seen in three years.”

Ian also said the service and quality offered by Ravensdown rates highly, and they’ve worked very hard to improve quality and service issues since entering the marketplace.

“When the product first came into the market, it started off a bit scratchy, but now the quality is second to none in the industry,” he said.

“They will also do any mixes you need – I’ve had all my planting mixes done through Ravensdown and delivered on farm. I’ve never had any issues with any of it.”

With Ravensdown now in its fourth year in the Queensland market, it was even more pressing to ensure growers were supporting the business as much as possible, to further cement its place in the industry.

Ian, who has been part of Mackay’s Target 10,000 tonnes campaign that increased Ravensdown tonnage in the Mackay region to nearly 16,000 tonnes this year, agrees.

“It would be absolutely tragic to lose Ravensdown. The price could double within weeks. It would be a return to no competition at all,” he said.

And that is not something Ravensdown’s Bruce Keenan is willing to contemplate.

With the recent announcement of Ravensdown’s Western Australian operation being offered for sale, Mr Keenan wants to reassure growers

Ian Stevenson and Robbie Townsend (Ian’s son-in-law and also a Ravensdown shareholder). Photos by Sonia Boll.

To find out how to become a Ravensdown shareholder call 1800 624 122 or talk to your local Account Manager.
Ravensdown is dedicated to growing its Queensland operation.

“Ravensdown Fertiliser Australia is committed to Queensland, and committed to the cane industry,” he said.

“Our operations in Queensland continue to grow due to the strong support from cane growers and are reinforced by the Board’s recent decision to invest $1.5 million in a new blending and bagging plant and four new regional fertiliser outlets in Tully, Innisfail, Babinda and Gordonvale.

“RFA is a separate subsidiary to WA and the support of Queensland growers is translating into growth in terms of tonnages and subsequent capital raised and invested by local growers.

“Unfortunately, it was a different story in Western Australia. In WA, despite a hard-working team with good facilities and equipment, the difficult market conditions meant that Ravensdown still made a loss.”

Mr Keenan said it was now up to growers to ensure they reach the tonnage to allow for more growth and further investment in Queensland.

“The cooperative principles of Ravensdown mean that our customers own part of Ravensdown – and that is something that our members value highly,” he said.

“Ravensdown remains committed to supplying Queensland farmers with quality fertiliser at the lowest sustainable cost.”

This year, it seems growers in Mackay have certainly heeded this message, with more Mackay-based growers than ever placing orders with Ravensdown, with a lot of credit owed to the CANEGROWERS Mackay Target 10,000 program.

The Target 10,000 program exceeded targets, with 16,000 tonnes of Ravensdown fertiliser sold to Mackay growers.

CANEGROWERS Queensland Chair Paul Schembri said this dedicated group had set the benchmark for growers to aspire to across the State.

“The success of the Target 10,000 campaign is a credit to those growers, who, like CANEGROWERS, strongly support and believe in Ravensdown,” he said.

“CANEGROWERS has staunchly supported the entry of Ravensdown into our industry, and continues to urge growers to show their support in the way of fertiliser orders.

“On the back of the successful Target 10,000 program in Mackay, CANEGROWERS state-wide is launching its own Target 100,000 program.

“It’s a big commitment, but we must make certain Ravensdown can remain in our market, to ensure competition is kept and growers are receiving the best deal possible. We are urging every grower to consider putting at least some of their fertiliser into Ravensdown so we can ensure they can remain a strong competitive force here in Queensland.”

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Growers urged to report Red Witchweed on their farms

By CANEGROWERS Senior Manager – Environment and Natural Resources, Matt Kealley

Weeds are a nuisance at the best of times. They can have a dramatic effect on production and cost time and money to manage. Even with the best management systems in place such as integrated weed management plans, green cane trash blanketing, well managed headlands, prudent residual and knock-down herbicide use, record keeping and observation; weeds still manage to find their way onto the paddock.

Now, a new serious exotic weed called Striga asiatica or Red Witchweed has been found in Mackay.

This weed is a root parasite that is exotic to Australia. It deprives host plants of water and nutrients and has the potential to seriously impact sugarcane and cereal crops as well as livestock pastures.

The serious exotic weed has been confirmed on a sugarcane property near Mackay and has now been declared a notifiable pest species. This is the first confirmed detection of Red Witchweed in Australia. However, as this weed has implications for trade, particularly in grain exports, its detection has triggered an emergency response by Biosecurity Queensland.

Red Witchweed causes an estimated $7 billion of damage in lost productivity to grain crops in Africa each year. It is native to parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

CANEGROWERS is currently liaising with the relevant Queensland and Australian Government departments on the response to the detection of the weed. While the weed has been confirmed on one sugarcane property, information to date suggests that the infestation may be on a small number of other properties in the immediate area.

Producers are now required under law to report Red Witchweed and are urged to check their crops and report anything they suspect could be Red Witchweed.

Biosecurity Queensland is undertaking a surveillance program to determine any spread of the weed and to put control measures in place.

The affected property has been placed under movement restrictions which means no equipment or plant material is allowed to be moved on or off the property without approval.

What should producers do?

• If producers suspect they have Red Witchweed they must report the plant immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.

If producers suspect they have Red Witchweed they must report the plant immediately to Biosecurity Queensland on 13 25 23.
WHAT’S NEW

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Identifying Red Witchweed

- Plant grows 200-400 mm tall.
- Attached to roots of its host.
- Leaves are arranged in opposite pairs along the stem.
- Leaves are 6-40 mm long and 1-4 mm wide and have a tapered pointed tip.
- Flowers are 5-20 mm long.
- Flowers are usually red, but sometimes white, yellow or pink.
- Five-sided capsule fruit 4 mm long and 2 mm wide.
- Seeds are very small and remain viable in the soil for up to 15 years.

Producers must not attempt to remove any flowering plants, as this may allow the weed to spread tiny, dust-like seeds. Seeds are primarily spread within the soil, and contain a complex underground root system. Therefore, keep the weed in place until Biosecurity Queensland can investigate.

Producers should mark or clearly note the location of the weed, and where possible take photos that may be used to help with identification.

If Red Witchweed is suspected, soil, machinery or products that might contain soil should not be moved off-site until a Biosecurity Queensland officer is consulted.

Sugar prices finished the fortnight in positive territory. The recent release of the Commitment of Trader (COT) report showed that speculators increased their net short position and the frost warning for Brazil triggered some short covering. The spot NY October finished the fortnight 43 points higher at 16.49 c/lb.

Brazil’s UNICA crop report, released last week, showed favourable weather conditions in early July (compared to May/June) which resulted in an increase in the volume of cane allocated to sugar rather than ethanol in early July.

Ahead, we expect producers to cap any significant rally in sugar futures, yet feel we are nearing the latter stages of the broader sugar surplus cycle which has driven the prices into a three year downtrend. The main factors to watch will be weather, movement in the Brazilian Real and the next Brazil UNICA crop report.

Currency

The Australian dollar made three year lows recently reaching the 90 cents level to the US greenback as global investors continued their exodus of our currency.

The weakness is a result of a number of market dynamics:

- Global Central banks are looking to reduce market liquidity that has been in place since the 2008 global financial crisis. The US Central bank has been somewhat mixed with their messages on this dominant market theme more recently, however continue to suggest the period of printing money is ending.
- Weaker economic data locally is causing the Reserve Bank of Australia to cut rates, with further cuts likely. Interest rate futures are now pricing in about 80 percent chance of a rate cut.
- Commodity prices have been under pressure as the Chinese economy cools. A fall in the official China Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) is expected later this week. A softer than expected Chinese manufacturing PMI is likely to add to concerns about the momentum in the Chinese economy and generate downside pressure on the Australian dollar.

Currency weakness now looks set to continue, with sub US$0.90 levels probable. This is good news for the Australian sugar industry going forward.
Good news as dredging goes ahead

By QSL Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Greg Beashel

In good news for the sugar industry, the Queensland and federal governments have recently announced that funding will be provided to further dredge the Bundaberg Port.

This means that once the Port has been restored, 30,000 tonne capacity ships will once again be able to berth at the Port, allowing QSL to resume exports direct to customers overseas from the Bundaberg Sugar Terminal.

Gladstone Ports Corporation, the operators of the Port, have advised that the first stage of dredging is due to commence around 26 August and be completed within two-and-a-half weeks.

QSL needs to move the sugar to make room for this year’s harvest. Currently, last year’s sugar is being moved via smaller shipments to Mackay where it’s being loaded onto larger ships for export.

The cost to industry to-date is about $6 million and this has been shared across the industry as part of the Shared Pool for 2012/13.

If further dredging was not undertaken, it is estimated that transferring the sugar between terminals would have cost the industry about $12 million by the end of the year.

QSL provided its support to CANEGROWERS and the Australian Sugar Milling Council (ASMC) in their endeavours to keep pressure on both governments to make a funding commitment.

It was great to see the industry working together with credit due to CANEGROWERS and ASMC for securing a timely commitment from both governments.

In other good news, I am pleased to announce that Standard & Poor’s, our official rating provider, has revised QSL’s rating with an upgrade to our outlook from ‘Negative’ to ‘Stable’ and have affirmed our existing ‘A long-term’ and ‘A1 short-term’ credit rating.

This supports QSL in continuing to offer financing services, such as the advances program, at rates lower than those generally available in the market, to our growing and milling members.

Overall, this upgrade demonstrates Standard & Poor’s confidence in QSL’s sustainable business model.

The full announcement by Standard & Poor’s is a welcome outcome and can be viewed on our website www.qsl.com.au.

You may have also recently heard on the ABC the first of our fortnightly QSL Market Update.

This reflects QSL’s commitment to keep you up-to-date with movements in the raw sugar export and currency markets.

QSL’s Treasurer Stephen Stone cuts through the complexity and explains how world market events impact on raw sugar prices for the Queensland sugar industry.

Should you miss it on air, a copy of the audio along with QSL’s daily market report and indicative prices are available on our website.

Simply visit www.qsl.com.au and register to receive our updates.

Finally, it’s pleasing to see the 2013 season is on-track. QSL is expecting to receive around 2.7 million tonnes of sugar this season to put through its value offerings.

This means that once the Port has been restored, 30,000 tonne capacity ships will once again be able to berth at the Port, allowing QSL to resume exports direct to customers overseas from the Bundaberg Sugar Terminal.

Greg Beashel, Chief Executive Officer, QSL

To-date, about 800,000 tonnes of sugar has been received at the terminals. The Harvest Pool, which is designed to manage production variations in the season, has approximately 1 million tonnes of sugar allocated to it with more than half of this sugar (roughly 570,000 tonnes) to be held in the production buffer.

The buffer is in place in the event crop shortfalls are experienced, such as those related to weather events and the potential effects of the Yellow Canopy Syndrome.

QSL are satisfied that the current buffer amount is suitable given current weather and production forecasts.

QSL’s Treasurer Stephen Stone cuts through the complexity and explains how world market events impact on raw sugar prices for the Queensland sugar industry.

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Greg Beashel, Chief Executive Officer, QSL
Electricity tariffs for ‘Food and Fibre Production’

By CANEGROWERS
Head – Economics,
Warren Males

A new approach for setting electricity tariffs for irrigated agriculture is needed if Queensland’s agricultural production is to double by 2040, enabling agricultural production in northern Australia to become the food bowl for Asia envisioned by federal and state governments alike.

Industry knows this, and government at both state and federal levels, are aware of it too.

The good news is that a new approach is both possible and achievable.

CANEGROWERS is advocating an approach to the development of electricity tariffs for irrigated agriculture that recognises its unique role in food and fibre production and positions the sector to take advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead.

The current approach to setting electricity tariffs requires the Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) to take the N (network) component of electricity prices as a given, passing these costs directly to higher prices for all end users.

Network costs and prices are reviewed by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER), a federal agency. To-date the AER has approved increases in the N component to ensure distribution network service providers received a guaranteed return on their investments.

Some of the factors driving the rapid escalation in the N component include:

- Overinvestment in network capacity to deal with growth in peak urban demand.
- An inflated regulated asset base.
- Less efficient network delivery than occurs in other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally.

- An allowance for the rebate paid to Photo-Voltaic (PV) solar cells.
- Payment to government to pay for escalated debt fees, corporate tax equivalent payments and a higher weighted average cost of capital than would be incurred in the private sector.

The state’s uniform tariff policy means Ergon’s electricity tariffs are based on Energex’s network tariffs. Energex’s network tariff structure does not make provision for irrigation tariffs and hence the QCA treats irrigation tariffs as obsolete.

Agricultural irrigation contributes to the base and off-peak network use. Agricultural irrigators are not contributing to critical peak load, should not be asked to subsidise those who have installed PV cells and, being export oriented, should not be asked to bear the burden of poor network investment decisions.

These are sound reasons why the N component of agricultural irrigation tariffs should be heavily discounted, set at zero or close to zero, when the QCA determines regulated electricity prices for 2014-15.

CANEGROWERS calls on both the federal and Queensland Government to direct their regulatory agencies, AER and QCA respectively, to adopt this approach in all future electricity price determinations. The different approach would ensure food and fibre producers face sustainable and fair electricity prices.

It would lift the efficiency of the network investment decisions by transferring some of the risk of those decisions away from users to those making the investment decisions.

CANEGROWERS is committed to working with state and federal governments to introduce a sustainable electricity pricing regime for irrigated agriculture, removing one of the impediments to achieving the government’s vision of doubling agricultural production in Queensland by 2040.

The chart on this page shows the electricity price build up. N is almost half the total.
By Paul Wright, Chairman, Sugar Research Australia

Today sees the beginning of an exciting new era of modern research, development and extension (RD&E) within the Australian sugarcane industry.

I am proud to announce that Sugar Research Australia (SRA) is now operational and we can begin to drive research excellence to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability.

Finalising the funding arrangements

We are currently in negotiations with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry regarding approval on the Statutory Funding Agreement.

Once approved by the Minister, the agreement, which is between SRA and the Commonwealth Government, will appoint SRA as the industry service group to the Australian sugarcane industry.

We will then be able to receive the levies that you have contributed, and invest these to grow our industry’s research capacity.

Maximising your research investment

The SRA Board is developing the Interim Strategic Plan.

The Interim Strategic Plan details how SRA will invest your levies to deliver research solutions that address the national RD&E priorities and issues facing growers and millers at a local level.

The Interim Strategic Plan must be submitted to the Minister within one month of the signing of the Statutory Funding Agreement. When finalised it will be made available on our website www.sugarresearch.com.au

The Interim Strategic Plan will also guide the newly appointed Research Funding Panel to make sound decisions as to which research projects will be invested in. The first round of SRA-funded research projects will commence on 1 January 2014.

The Board will also soon commence developing the longer-term Strategic Plan which once completed, will supersede the Interim Strategic Plan.

I would like to invite all stakeholders to consult with us so that we capture the views of industry organisations, and grower and miller levy payers.

Your views will help shape SRA’s longer-term research direction and ensure that together, we work on what you consider is important.

Our commitment to the Australian sugarcane industry

We know that our levy payers and stakeholders want to see that every dollar invested in SRA is used wisely to produce knowledge and practices that can be adopted on-farm and in the mill for better outcomes.

The SRA Board is acutely aware of your expectations.

We are dedicated to fulfilling these expectations by investing only in the best ideas and actively managing this research to deliver value to our industry.
At the end of week five, Mossman Mill had crushed 146,994 tonnes of cane for a mill average of 11.53 CCS. The weather conditions have been very favourable for the first five weeks of crushing.

**TABLELAND**

At the end of week seven, the Tableland Mill had crushed just over 178,000 tonnes and the mill average CCS was 13.35. The crop is still cutting above estimate and the mill is still performing inconsistently. CANEGROWERS Tableland members are invited on a bus trip to tour the Mossman Mill. The bus will leave the Post Office Centre in Mareeba at 8.30 am on Tuesday 6 August and will return by 2.15 pm. Morning tea and lunch will be provided. Thank you to Ravensdown Fertiliser Australia for sponsoring the bus.

**INNISFAIL**

Despite receiving in excess of 150 mm of rain across the district over the preceding two weeks, with 150-170 mm recorded in a 24 hour period, harvesting was able to get under way again on 23 July. The district CCS was a surprise, although still low, it picked up a little on the first two days of harvesting to sit at just under 11.5 CCS. Planting operations are still on hold. If further rainfall holds off, many growers will get busy and prepare land. The district Community GPS Base Station Network is almost established with the final base stations coming on-line. The network was able to be established through funding under the Reef Rescue Network.

**BURDEKIN**

Crushing has been progressing well with approximately 275,000 tonnes of cane processed after five weeks at an average CCS of 12.5. KQ228 and Q208 are the highest-testing varieties and make up the majority of supply in the region, however significant areas have been able to plant early. The show cane display should be of a high standard and will feature a phone video competition which will profile characters and cane related activities.

**PROSERPINE**

Another rain-interrupted fortnight with only 132,108 tonnes crushed. The harvesting sector performed exceptionally well to supply the quantity of cane they did. A total of 246,269 tonnes has been crushed to date with an average CCS of 13.34. Variety KQ228 has dominated supply during the early stage and has provided the stronger than expected CCS results. The crop continues to cut close to estimate. The mill appears to have overcome some initial teething problems and has been performing well between stops.

**MACKAY**

A total of 240,255 tonnes of cane was crushed across the three Mackay region mills last week ending 20 July. Bin weights this year are still reduced which does have some impact on the cycle times at the mills. Farleigh Mill, overall, had a good run for the week with 92.5% plant availability, albeit at reduced rates due to lack of cane supply. Wet weather has resulted in the PRS and purity of the incoming cane to drop in the last week, while fibre was mixed, with some areas up and others down. A total of 54,149 tonnes of cane was crushed in Plane Creek for the week ending 20 July. Throughput was lower than expected due to a derailment and rain. A cleaning intermission was held on Tuesday 16 July. The highest CCS sample for the week was from a rake of first ratoon KQ228 at 15.65 from the Carmila Productivity District.

**BUNDABERG**

Millaquin and Bingera mills had a combined throughput of 86,831 tonnes for the last week prior to 23 July. This takes the season total to 304,618 tonnes and is approximately 20% of the season estimate. The average CCS for the district was 13.66, an increase of 0.37 units for the week. The CCS for Millaquin was 13.77 and Bingera was 13.51. Both mill areas have increased the average CCS again this week. The highest individual CCS was in the Millaquin supply area, where a block of KQ228A second ratoon recorded 16.60 units. The major variety, with 41% of the supply, was KQ228A. This variety achieved an average CCS of 14.36 at Millaquin and 14.03 at Bingera.

**ISIS**

Crushing has been progressing well with approximately 275,000 tonnes of cane processed after five weeks at an average CCS of 12.5. KQ228 and Q208 are the highest-testing varieties and make up the majority of supply in the first five weeks. Unfortunately, cane is cutting out below estimate and Isis Mill has recently reduced the estimate by 100,000 tonnes to 1.2 million tonnes of cane. The flood affected crops are presenting some problems from two points of view. The first is from low CCS and the other is from the debris that the flood has left behind. Investigations are under way as to the best way to pick up this debris and the Burnett Mary Regional Group for natural resource management is facilitating discussions regarding utilising Job Network personnel and potentially Department of Corrections prisoners.

**MARYBOROUGH**

Persistent rain over the past few weeks has delayed the start of crushing which was due to commence on 23 July. Commencement date is now scheduled for 29 July.
Investing in irrigation efficiency saves in the long run

We’ve always said efficient irrigation saves money and water; however a new study has put paid to these claims. A report out of the dairy industry this fortnight has found that government investment in irrigation efficiency projects is far better for the environment, the community and irrigators than buying back water allocations long term. Timely then, that in this edition we feature irrigation parts and equipment. Could now be the time to review your irrigation equipment and assess if it’s as efficient as it could be?

Jasmine Hunt

New Lindsay sensors include soil moisture monitors

Lindsay Corporation, maker of Zimmatic irrigation systems, announces the addition of soil moisture monitoring and a weather station to its Growsmart by Lindsay product line. These plug-and-play add-ons use a wireless connection to report relevant weather and soil water data from the field to a secure customer account on the internet.

FieldNET by Lindsay software and supporting mobile apps, provide the graphical user interface, convenience and reporting growers need to make more informed irrigation decisions, according to Reece Andrews, new technology product manager at Lindsay.

Mr Andrews said the Growsmart sensors are designed to provide growers information that enhances irrigation management using FieldNET’s management tools, which allow growers to remotely monitor and control their entire irrigation system.

"Integrating soil moisture and the weather station with FieldNET allows growers one easy-to-use platform that controls pumps and pivots, records water and energy usage, tracks soil moisture levels and trends, and logs local weather station information. Growers are automatically notified about conditions that require action," he says.

The soil moisture station and probes can be named for quick reference and linked to the associated fields. Soil moisture trends are illustrated in easy-to-read graphs and provide current trending and season-over-season history. Soil moisture monitoring can help growers decide when to apply irrigation.

For more information, visit www.growsmart.com or talk to your local Zimmatic dealer.

Efficient irrigation a key factor in maintaining productivity

Table 1: Irrigation requirements for sugarcane regions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Annual crop water use (mm)</th>
<th>Effective rainfall (mm)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cairns/Mossman</td>
<td>1630</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>270</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Herbert</td>
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<td>580</td>
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<td>ES</td>
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<td>Rocky Point</td>
<td>1150</td>
<td>990</td>
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<td>LS</td>
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NI = no irrigation; LS = limited supplementary; MS = moderate supplementary; ES = extensive supplementary; F = full irrigation.

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Installing irrigation mains – quickly and efficiently

Supplied by Drain Tech

Drain Tech is a leader in the field of design and installation of sub-surface drainage systems and also uses their trenching expertise to install rising mains for irrigation systems.

Drain Tech director, Richard Gloyne, urges landholders to consider trenching as an alternative to traditional excavation methods.

He said appropriately-designed chain diggers are able to trench neatly and accurately, with or without grade control, and the trenching process reduces all material to a finely graded tilth.

“On many projects the cost of importing and placing bedding material can be avoided by using this excavated spoil as backfill,” he said.

“Site re-instatement is another bonus with all excavated material able to be graded back over the pipe and crowned. Impact is confined to the immediate narrow trench so crop damage is minimised.”

Mr Gloyne said Drain Tech offers a complete excavate, install and close service that is popular with time-poor landholders. Forward planning however, is essential. Factors that need consideration include:

- Route planning to consider materials required and existing underground services.
- Provision for future extensions or branch lines.
- Checklist for all components to be on site before excavation commences.

Drain Tech’s installation system involves the excavation and laying of the pre-assembled pipe in a continuous operation.

“We use a rolling pipe sling to gently lift the assembled pipe and lower it to the trench floor,” said Mr Gloyne.

“Delays due to design changes and or component shortfalls can lead to expensive hold-ups with trench collapse or water ingress. Like all capital works, prior planning produces an irrigation system that performs faultlessly and gives efficiencies into the future.”

Scan the QR code with your smartphone for more information.
Report confirms water efficiency trumps buybacks

A new report has confirmed that investment in on-farm water efficiency projects leads to wider economic, social and environmental benefits than water purchases or ‘buybacks.’

The report, released last month by the Australian dairy group Dairy Australia, shows that on-farm water efficiency programs result in longer lasting and more effective benefits to the farm and the region than simple buybacks can achieve.

President of the National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) Duncan Fraser says the report confirms the NFF’s long-held view that water purchases should be the option of last resort, not the first step in improving water efficiency.

“We have long said that making the water that is currently in the system more efficient is a far more effective outcome than simply removing that water from agricultural production altogether,” he said.

“As this report shows, the direct benefits of investing in on-farm water efficiencies are increased farm productivity and a reduction in water use.

“Importantly, there are also flow on benefits in an accelerated and more cost effective farm development, improved business resilience, and a greater chance of farm succession to the next generation – all positive steps in ensuring a strong future for our agricultural sector, while balancing the need to conserve one of our most valuable water resources.”

The report, compiled by consulting firm RMCG on behalf of Dairy Australia, consists of a cost-benefit analysis of farm irrigation modernisation on dairy farms in Victoria and NSW, and contrasts the benefits of the On Farm Irrigation Efficiency Program versus water buybacks when it comes to saving water for the environment, and overall productivity and return on farms.

The report shows that investment in on-farm water efficiency programs is also an investment in the regional economy, with a significant flow on to the regional economy – while water purchases were shown to reduce the regional economic activity.
High input, high return for Bundaberg grower

By Amy Claireton

In 1946, Dean Cayley’s grandfather bought a bush block at Alloway, south of Bundaberg, cleared it and planted cane, peanuts and tobacco. Sixty-five years and a variety of crops later, Dean finds himself growing cane and peanuts.

Five years ago, Dean planted his first peanut crop and has been very pleased with the yield and positive effect on his cane. These five years have included two seasons of very heavy rain, so one year Dean did not plant peanuts and another year he planted very late and the yield was low. The other three years have yielded over 8 t/ha.

Dean has found the Holt variety to be the best suited to his operation, due mainly to better disease resistance. This year the Holt variety only needed five fungicide sprays, less than half than what is sometimes required. “We also plant late, around the second week of December, and this means the crop finishes off in the cooler months with less disease pressure,” he says. “We harvest between May and June then prepare for planting cane in spring.”

“Each year we have 14 to 16 ha fallow that we plant to legumes,” says Dean. “Peanuts are our preferred crop but some of our soils are not suited to peanuts so we grow soybean when those blocks are fallow.”

With a long history growing small crops, most recently potatoes for crisping, Dean treats his peanut crops more like a horticultural crop than broadacre. “Starting with soil testing we try to supply everything the crop needs to produce its maximum yield,” he says. “We have found that potassium seems to drive yield and that it is worth side-dressing.”

Peanuts are planted with 450–500 kg/ha of base fertiliser plus side-dressing as required. At the end of the crop there is a significant amount of plant-available

Farmers teaching farmers

Key learnings

- Dean Cayley planted his first peanut crop five years ago and has been pleased with the yield and positive effect on his cane crop.
- Peanuts are grown as a rotation fallow crop, and replenish the soil between cane.
- The Cayleys have invested in precision farming technology with the help of the federal government’s Reef Rescue project.
- The precision technology help ensure nutrients, pesticides and soil remain on the farm.
After peanuts Dean plants cane with 250 kg/ha base fertiliser and no side-dressing. He expects to cut around 50 t/ha off plant cane blocks planted last August. This represents a saving of 500–600 kg/ha side-dressing, making the plant cane crop much less expensive while also achieving higher yield.

“We apply a CaN blend rather than urea,” says Dean. “We started using this product in potatoes and find it is good in cane too. It is surface applied and less volatile than urea.”

Although this blend ends up slightly more expensive than urea, because it goes on at a higher rate, Dean says there are many advantages because it does not have to be watered in immediately. Dean applies around 800 kg/ha of the CaN blend on his ratoon crops. Last year he trialled fortified dunder and found it a cheaper option for no loss of yield.

The majority of the soil on the Cayley’s 150 ha farm is well drained sandy loam with low organic matter. This year Dean’s farm received 500 mm of rain in January and his peanut crop was under water for a week but it came through it to yield 8 t/ha.

To get into peanuts Dean bought a second-hand vacuum planter so it could plant the larger peanut seed as well as soybeans. He has a contractor to thresh the peanuts and uses his own spray gear. “We also have an interrow cultivator that we used when we grew green beans, that has been adapted to cultivate and side-dress peanuts when necessary,” he says.

Dean’s father, Neville, started contract billet planting in 1985 but the family reduced their contracting work while they were growing potatoes but now they are able to increase this part of their business again. “Growing potatoes was very labour intensive,” says Dean.

“We employed eight to ten people during the potato season but can grow peanuts using just one employee. This gives us time to expand the contract planting business to plant around 500 ha of cane for other growers.”

Having the peanuts and planting contract makes it easier for the Cayley’s to maintain one full-time employee.

Generally Dean looks to grow three or four ratoons. He cuts the ploughout blocks early and prepares for the summer legume by soil testing, laser leveling and...
Left: Dean bought a retired cotton picker and used it to build a high-rise sprayer that can treat 10 ha of cane for both grass and vine weeds before being re-filled. The 5-interrow spray unit can apply herbicides directed toward the ground and sideways into the canopy.
Right: The unique idea of using a forklift mast as a mechanism to raise and lower the boom was suggested to Dean, who then built and mounted the boom on farm.

adding lime and gypsum according to the recommendations from the soil test. After the legume crop is finished Dean does a full land preparation to prepare for planting cane. Dean’s farm is set up on 1.52 m row spacing, a legacy of potato production, but Dean has no plans to increase the row width.

“We have GPS guidance in all the tractors so we have been able to reduce compaction and maintain row placement for all crops,” he says. “This way we are maximising the benefit of residual fertiliser and organic matter left from previous crops.”

About 90% of the Cayley’s farm is cut green but there are 12 ha that stays too wet to cut green. “We have only been cutting green for the last four years but between the trash and the legumes we are already noticing an increase in calcium levels and a slight improvement in the buffering capacity of our soil,” says Dean.

The federal government’s Reef Rescue program has assisted the Cayleys with precision farming equipment to ensure nutrients, pesticides and soil remain on the farm.

“The high rise spray unit we have built gives us great control of herbicide application and saves time,” he says.

“The spray unit capacity means we only have to stop to refill after about two hours of spraying, meaning we can make the most of good spray conditions, covering around 10 ha per fill.”

Converting an old cotton picker into a high rise sprayer was Neville’s brainchild. He spent hours working on ideas and plans with a local engineering firm to modified the frame. Dean and his employee, Norm, then built the boom, mounted on a forklift mast, from scratch on the farm.

The GPS gear in the tractors has helped reduce compaction and the crops are responding to the better access to nutrients.
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CANEGROWERS member,
Andrew Vassallo, Eton

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Weather report

Weather report brought to you by AustSafe Super

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Recorded rainfall (mm)</th>
<th>Average rainfall (mm)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>7 days to 9am</td>
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