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COVER IMAGE: With the global sugar price at a three-year low, Gordonvale cane growers John and Charlie Piccolo have started cultivating rice to help boost their bottom line. Read more on page 18.

Editor: Wayne Griffin

Design, subscriptions and classifieds:
Jacqui Segond

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Level 6, 100 Edward Street, Brisbane,
Queensland Australia

ABN 94 089 992 969

Postal Address: GPO Box 1032, Brisbane,
Queensland 4001 Australia

Telephone: 07 3864 6444; Fax: 07 3864 6429

Email: info@CANEGROWERS.com.au

Website: www.CANEGROWERS.com.au

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Governments – get off our backs!

By Paul Schembri, Chairman CANEGROWERS

The first smoke from the chimney of Farleigh Mill just north of Mackay signalled the start of Queensland's 2018 sugarcane harvest. Farleigh Mill's lead will be followed by Queensland's remaining 20 mills, all of which will hopefully be crushing by the time you receive this issue of *Australian Canegrower*.

This year's crop estimate currently sits at approximately 32.5 million tonnes of cane.

Over the years, I have learnt that it is unwise to attempt to describe the weather and crop conditions across 2000kms of coastline and 13 cane-growing districts.

However, there is little doubt that the floods experienced in North Queensland will have an adverse impact on the crop in the northern region.

Equally, the failure of the wet season in Mackay and Proserpine has downsized the crop in the central growing region.

Thankfully, there have been pockets of almost ideal growing conditions in some areas, such as Maryborough where growers are looking forward to a record crop of over one million tonnes.

What lies ahead is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that good weather and mill reliability will be key to ensuring Queensland's 4,500 growers get their crop off successfully.

More than anything else, all of us in the Queensland sugar industry are hopeful of a safe harvest. With so much machinery at play, far too often we have witnessed injuries and fatalities during the cane harvest. I am sure we will all make a conscious effort to ensure the 2018 harvest season is a safe one for all.

REEF REGULATIONS

The Queensland Government is currently considering the introduction of new regulatory measures that will impact on the farm sector adjoining the Great Barrier Reef. It has released two potential new regulations into the public arena for discussion.

One is a requirement for all farms to have a Nutrient Management Plan in place. This is effectively a new obligation over and above what current laws require.

Smartcane BMP already requires farmers to have a Nutrient Management Plan as a key component of the program. It seems overly bureaucratic to impose a new standard over and above what the industry already sees as best practice.

The second potential new regulation relates to the management of cane land with a slope greater than 3%. Described as a sediment management plan, it has the potential to capture around 50% of the Queensland sugar industry.

While there is a lot more detail to be ascertained, we are naturally wary of this interaction with government.

Recent government approaches to environmental policy, which ignored farmers' concerns and delivered unworkable vegetation management legislation, cannot be repeated.

Queensland's cane farmers have been working hard to help protect the reef through participation in the Smartcane BMP program, supporting research on nitrogen management, and the adoption of the Six Easy Steps nutrient program.

We have bought into the various reef programs by investing our own money into new practices and technology. As a result, there has been some fantastic outcomes and great partnerships formed.

We're very concerned that if government rams home unnecessary regulations, this will all stop. Nothing collapses grower confidence more than the constant shifting of goalposts.

As far back as 2009, the Queensland Government has enforced legislation designed to protect the reef.

Also, the industry's Smartcane BMP program already captures all of the outcomes being sought by the proposed new regulations.

How much more regulation is required? When will it end?

The cane growers of Queensland have taken great strides to ramp up our environmental performance over the last thirty years.

We have achieved this move by attitudinal change and collaboration with State and Federal Governments through sensible incentive-based programs.

Growers have shown leadership in demonstrating how they have changed and have committed to stand up for a process of continuous industry-led improvements.

Simply, we say to the State Government – we have had enough! More regulation will have little or no public benefit and may act to discourage others from getting involved.

We say to government – sit down and talk to farmers about sensible approaches to environmental management – not solutions that are bureaucratic and self-serving to environmental activists. ■



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NEWS IN BRIEF

INDUSTRY QUESTIONS ERGON ON CHARGES

CANEGROWERS has questioned if Ergon is breaching national electricity laws and charging customers for services that are not being supplied.

"Our members rely heavily on pumping water for irrigation during the dry times of the year and the cost of electricity is threatening the international competitiveness of Queensland agriculture," CANEGROWERS CEO **Dan Galligan** said.

CANEGROWERS has written to Ergon outlining the findings of an independent investigation into both Ergon and Energex's tariff structure statements.

"Both the Ergon and Energex networks have spare capacity which has not been taken into account in tariff design."

The letter is being forwarded to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Energy Regulator.

"The examination by the Sapere Research Group concluded that the current suite of distribution tariffs breach the mandatory requirements set out in the Network Pricing Rules and the National Electricity Objective," Mr Galligan said.

"In the case of Ergon, they also raised the concern that Ergon is breaching National Electricity Law.

"This is because the peak and volumetric components of the approved network

tariffs substantially overstate the forward costs of network supply.

"Congestion costs and long run marginal costs (LRMC) are over-stated – in fact they are doubled

"Both the Ergon and Energex networks have spare capacity which has not been taken into account in tariff design.

"And by looking at daily load profiles only, without taking into account the duration of the greatest load, the tariff designers are getting a distorted view of the demands on the network.

"That perpetuates and increases the inefficiencies and cross subsidies in the current tariff system where we have farmers being unfairly charged as if the electricity they are accessing is in high demand and the system needs more investment."

With irrigation capacity unchanged in Queensland since the establishment of Paradise Dam in 2005 and significant spare electricity network capacity in each of the state's irrigation areas, CANEGROWERS believes there is no need to augment or extend the network in the foreseeable future to meet the needs of irrigated agriculture across Queensland.

"CANEGROWERS has called on Energy Queensland to design modern efficient network tariffs that would support base load and off-peak (infra-marginal) use profiles, including worthwhile time-of-use incentives, encouraging users to switch their usage to off-peak periods and over the weekend. ■

SEE TRACK, THINK TRAIN

With the 2018 crush cranking up around the state, MSF Sugar is once again urging drivers in Queensland's cane-growing regions to be extra vigilant on the roads.

"Our rail network sits dormant for six months of the year ... This creates a level of complacency among motorists," MSF Sugar's **Chris Hoare** said.

"Our cane rail network is critical to the industry – it's a part of our transport team's workplace and allows us to get our growers sugarcane back to the mill safely.

"We hope the public will join us to help make sure the cane crushing season is a safe one, by remaining aware and alert when crossing the rail network."

The average loco weighs 18 to 40 tonnes, and as much as 600 tonnes when under full load. It has a stopping distance of approximately 250 metres .

"It's important to understand just how dangerous cane trains can be. There's an incorrect assumption that cane trains are 'small' and can't hurt you, but this is far from correct," Cane Supply Manager **Ken Hall** said.



WEBCKE SPEAKS OUT FOR FARM SAFETY

Queensland rugby league legend **Shane Webcke** has thrown his weight behind the State Government's new ag safety campaign, calling on farm workers to stop and think about safety on the job.

Despite only 3% of Queenslanders working on farms, more than 30% of all workplace deaths occur in the agricultural sector, and every week 17 farm workers are injured seriously enough to require at least a week off work.

"If you work on the land, stop and think about doing your job safely. Because those few seconds could save your life — and your livelihood," said Webcke, whose father Tom was killed in a workplace accident in 1994.

For more information on workplace safety or to download farm safety resources, visit www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/agsafetycampaign. ■



Lacklustre budget misses mark

CANEGROWERS says it is disappointed that the Queensland Government had again overlooked the state's agricultural industry in the 2018-19 State Budget, with little substance or strategy for the future of farming.

CANEGROWERS CEO **Dan Galligan** today said he supported the position of the Queensland Farmer's Federation (QFF) in calling the budget 'lacklustre' and a 'missed opportunity' when it came to the agricultural industry.

"There are bits and pieces to support the agricultural industry, but there is no overarching strategy associated with how the government plans to grow our sector while, for example, the government have allocated nearly \$100 million over five years to grow Queensland's tourism sector," Mr Galligan said.

"Where is the funding and the foresight for Queensland's agricultural industry, and the support for farmers and growers who desperately want a government to invest in them and their future?"

Mr Galligan said funding for further reef protection measures, the Rural Jobs and Skills Alliance, and the Energy Savers Program was welcome, however there was nothing in the budget about increasing the productivity growth of the state's farming sector.

QFF CEO **Travis Tobin** said he gave credit to the government for delivering on its election commitments, however it had again ignored the critical need to develop a more strategic intent for agriculture in Queensland.

"By 2030, two-thirds of the world's middle class will be living in the Asia-Pacific region. To make the most of this demographic shift and subsequent demand for food and clothing, Queensland agriculture will need to intensify so we must address current competitiveness challenges and increase investment in the longer-term enablers and drivers of sustainable and profitable intensified production systems," Mr Tobin said.

"With the government's effort to make sure election commitments were funded now out of the way, it is time to refocus the agenda on targeted and strategic investment that will help drive the sector forward to capitalise on the opportunities that exist." ■

MEMBERSHIP BROCHURE

As a grower-led organisation, CANEGROWERS is dedicated to advocating strongly on behalf of our members. It's our mission to ensure growers can continue to operate productive and profitable farming businesses into the future, leaving a strong and viable industry to the next generation of sugarcane growers. Turn to page 13 to discover the many ways in which CANEGROWERS works to support your business. ■



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CANEGROWERS Regional round-up

Mossman

The first cane bin was tipped at Mackay Sugar's Mossman Mill late on Monday 4 June, marking the start of the 2018 crush.

The current crop estimate is 1,150,000 tonnes of cane, with Mossman Mill to crush 850,000 tonnes and MSF Mill to toll-crush 300,000 tonnes.

If all goes well, we are looking at a 21-22 week season on the coast, with a proposed finish date in the first week of November 2018.

Weather conditions are ideal at present and with much cooler temperatures being felt around the district, Mossman growers are hoping for good sugar content in the cane.

Innisfail

Crushing commenced at South Johnstone Mill on Wednesday 13 June. The current pre-season estimate to be crushed at South Johnstone is 1,487,500 tonnes with a further 245,000 of SJ-contracted cane to be crushed at Mulgrave Mill.

However, the general view of growers is that the estimate is too high, especially considering the final yield achieved in 2017 of 78.72 tonnes/ha and the impact of heavy rainfall and wet conditions experienced in March.

Wet weather has continued to hamper farming activity across the district and very little land preparation and planting has been achieved. There has been moderate flowering across the district so far.

Negotiations between grower representatives and MSF Sugar for the replacement Collective Cane Supply Agreement (CCSA) for the 2020 Season and beyond, have commenced.

The roll-out of the Major Integrated Project is continuing with the focus in coming months to establish wetlands in strategic location and bioreactors aimed at reduction of dissolved inorganic nitrogen. Also, as part of the Wet Tropic Sugar Industry Partnership (WTSIP), growers across the district are engaging with Extension Officers to complete Whole of Farm Enhanced Nutrient Management Plans, which connect with the Smartcane BMP program.

Tully

The Tully crush commenced on Tuesday 5 June, but quickly ran into trouble with a fault in the shredder causing significant delays. Crushing did not recommence until late on Thursday 7 June. The mill is now back in action and has crushed 60,000 tonnes with a CCS of 12.28, the best early CCS since 2009. Growers have taken advantage of a relatively dry June to do some early planting, and continue to make the most of the conditions with more cool dry weather predicted for the next week.

Proserpine

Proserpine's forecast area for the 2018 harvest is 21,774 hectares, which is slightly down on last year.

Improved growing conditions (and the absence of a cyclone) should see a return to normal production this year. Yield is expected to be above 80 tonnes per hectare, which equates to a pre-season estimate of 1.72 million tonnes.

Given the area to be harvested and the size of the crop, the mill is scheduled to commence crushing on Tuesday 19 June. The proposed crushing plan has the crush completed by 7 November, after allowing for scheduled maintenance and wet weather interruptions.

A drier than average May and the cool start to winter should also guarantee an improvement in CCS. Current expectations are for a season average CCS around 14.20.

Nominations for this year's Show Cane Awards will open prior to the start of the crush and growers are encouraged to enter.

Herbert River

Crushing got underway at the Herbert's Victoria and Macknade mills on Tuesday 12 June, with the first rakes of cane tipped into the mill carriers. The weather was fine and harvesting conditions generally good for the first day.

The Herbert is facing a crop that has had its potential clipped back by the twin flooding events in March. The mill estimate of 4.7 million tonnes, based mainly on April observations, is generally regarded as an overestimation as it was prepared before the final impact assessment was completed.

The final impact assessment report was a collaborative effort locally between CANEGROWERS Herbert River and HCPSL, which for the first time had support from the Remote Sensing Team, Precision Agriculture Research Group headed by Professor Andrew Robson, University of New England Armidale NSW.

Professor Robson's team was enlisted for support after a remarkably accurate yield prediction was generated following Cyclone Debbie in 2017. In the Herbert's case the imagery and predicted yield loss areas correlated well with ground observations made by HCPSL in several case studies where data was also shared with QDAF's own rapid assessment team.

From an initial potential crop of 5.1 million tonnes before the flood events, the assessment shows a total loss of 566,500 tonnes with damage to headlands, farm roads, soil loss from cane paddocks as well as significant damage to river and stream banks including some of really major proportions. As a result the 2018 crop is now estimated at 4.5 million tonnes from some 58,077 hectares.

Mackay

A recent cold snap will see the ripening of the crop elevating sugar content, and good weather is to date holding with planting off to a good start in the dry conditions.

Moisture (winter rain) will be needed to ensure the 2019 crop gets off to a good start.

Mackay Sugar

Mackay Sugar up to Tuesday, June 5 (week 1).

Farleigh Mill crushed 31,166.07 t cane

Marian Mill throughput was 24,092.54 t cane

Racecourse Mill was expected to come online on Monday June 4 (no statistics available).

Estimate: 5.09M tonnes

CCS: 10.59

PRS: 10.76

Plane Creek (Wilmar Sugar)

Estimate 1.23M tonnes

Crushing expected to begin Thursday June 14 (harvesting Monday June 11).

Burdekin

Wilmar's Burdekin managers met with grower representatives in late April to conduct the consultation required under Cane Supply Agreements to determine a start date for the 2018 season.

The 2018 season forecast data, showing a season estimate of 8.46 million tonnes for Burdekin district, was presented at the meeting. This is approximately 5% above the Burdekin average.

The area available for harvest has increased in all mill areas with Inkerman indicating the highest year-to-year increase in yield at 6.2%, against a Burdekin average increase of 3.6%.

Wilmar informed the meeting that

crushing operations at all Burdekin Mills will commence on Tuesday 12 June. Forecast season finish dates that include up to 34 days for stops (be they unscheduled, scheduled or rain) for each mill indicate 26 November for Invicta, Pioneer and Kalamia and 5 December for Inkerman.

Noticeable in the field sector for this coming season is the shortage of drivers experienced in operating harvester and haul out machinery.

With fine weather forecast for the start and hopefully continuing throughout the harvest season we are all looking forward to a safe and productive harvest with much improved CCS results.

Maryborough

Another season is upon the Maryborough district, with MSF Sugar Mill starting its crush on 11 June, following an intense repair and maintenance schedule.

Extensive updating has been completed on the B-Double trailer fleet to improve safe storage of cane and some single trailers will also be updated.

Inductions for harvesters and hauliers were carried out on 5 June. Access into the MSF sugar mill site requires adherence to their workplace health and safety procedures, with drivers issued with hardhats, gloves, safety glasses and ear protection.

Estimates for the season crop remain at 940,000 tonnes with all areas showing significant gains in production through summer and autumn.

With the large crop to be harvested it is important to adhere to the safe loading limits covered in the induction for harvesters and hauliers.

Everyone working together will bring a successful season. ■

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Powered by AustSafe Super's insurance partner, CommInsure, the dynamic online claims service allows members to lodge a claim online and track its progress as its being assessed.

AustSafe Super chief executive, Craig Stevens, said the new digital service will simplify the claims process for many members and will lead to faster claims turnaround times, ultimately improving outcomes for members with insurance claims.

"AustSafe Super's 100,000 members are spread throughout rural and regional Australia – including some remote parts of the country – so the ability for them to be able to fast-track an insurance claim online is something we're proud to be offering," he said.

The digital claims service is a web-based app for Income Protection, Total and Permanent Disability and Terminal Illness claims, and will lead to claims being received by the insurer within minutes and removing the need for paper-based forms.

Now in its 30th year of operation, AustSafe Super is the industry super fund for rural and regional Australia and looks after more than 100,000 members with \$2.4 billion funds under management.

For more information, please visit austsafe.com.au

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Determining the best fit for Enhanced Efficiency **FERTILISERS FOR THE CANE INDUSTRY**



In most parts of the industry this year, farmers have worn a well-trodden path to their rain gauge.

Heavy rainfall, flooding, and near-hit cyclones peppered the industry throughout the summer and continued even as harvest approached.

The conditions have been positive for some growers and horrendous for others, especially those in the hardest-hit flood regions.

Where there is heavy rain, and across the industry more generally, there's a lot of discussion about the best timing and efficient uptake of nutrient inputs by cane plant.

Against that backdrop, a major project is underway assessing various types of Enhanced Efficiency Fertilisers (EEFs) and their role in productivity, profitability, and sustainability outcomes for the Australian sugarcane industry.

The project is a joint initiative of Queensland CANEGROWERS and Sugar Research Australia (SRA), with SRA as the lead research agency, and a number of productivity services organisations partnering in the project to deliver extension to industry.

EEFs are not new products, but in the sugar industry there remain a number of important questions for growers and advisors, especially around these products' efficacy and how this stacks up against the extra cost that comes with most of these products when compared to standard urea.

EEFs come in two main forms: polymer-coated products and nitrification inhibitors.

The polymer coated products release nitrogen slowly and ideally this release pattern matches with the nitrogen requirements of the cane, while the nitrification inhibitors stabilise N in the ammonium form, which is available for the cane but less likely to be lost than nitrate.

It has been a busy year for the teams on the ground, led by SRA's Julian Connellan at Gordonvale, Nick Hill at Mackay, and John Panitz at Bundaberg.

Across the project, from the Wide Bay north, there are 60 controlled and replicated field trials, which will be assessed and analysed over three seasons, representing a massive 180 trial-years of data. As the project progresses, this wealth of knowledge will be combined with economic information

and continually extended back to industry through the extension officers and regular communication.

In recent months, the teams have been in the field and undertaking biomass sampling of crops, targeting the 9-month crop stage.

Nick Hill explained that the purpose of this is to gather information about nitrogen uptake by the crop.

"The process involves counting and cutting stalks across a defined distance, weighing the samples and then processing a subsample in preparation for chemical analysis so as to determine what amount of nitrogen was taken up and how it is partitioned by the plant into millable stalk or leaf and cabbage," he said.

"This is important for determining whether EEF products improve nitrogen use efficiency.

"My team works across the Central and Burdekin regions, where the wet weather has been largely welcome, but also meant some juggling to get the job done, as the case with everyone in the industry."



In the north, Julian Connellan and his team have faced even wetter conditions, which they are hopeful will put the products to the test and produce useful results for industry after the harvest data has been collected.

The project team is now looking ahead to the busy harvest period.

At each trial site, four N treatments are being applied:

1. SIX EASY STEPS N rate using urea;
2. 80 percent of the SIX EASY STEPS N rate using urea;
3. 80 percent of the SIX EASY STEPS N rate using a 1/3 nitrification inhibitor and 2/3 polymer coated urea; and
4. A wildcard treatment, which is any EEF at 80 percent of the SIX EASY STEPS N rate. Thus far these have included: Entec® and Entrench® and Urea and polymer coated blends.

There are also six water quality monitoring sites across the project, and this data has been collected. ■

EEF60 at a glance

- 60 trials sites, across three seasons
- 30 in Wet Tropics; 15 in Burdekin; 10 in Central; 5 in Southern regions
- The trials look at EEFs in terms of tonnes of cane, CCS, nitrogen use efficiency, and economics
- Trials are generally 4–6 hectares in size

Pictured: (left) SRA Researcher Julian Connellan and technician James Oldacre biomass sampling at Mulgrave, south of Cairns. (above) Weighing biomass samples at the SRA Meringa research station.

This project is funded by the Australian Government Reef Trust and Queensland Government Great Barrier Reef Innovation Fund.

EEF60 — Trials of Enhanced Efficiency Fertiliser



CANEGROWERS



Growers discover the delights of Japan on QSL study tour



QSL's inaugural grower study tour has been hailed a success, following the return of the group from a week in Japan.

The travelling party featured growers from throughout the state and was led by representatives of the QSL team.

The seven-night itinerary based the group in Tokyo, where they met with QSL customers and were hosted at a number of refineries where they saw firsthand just how their sugar is processed for the Japanese market.

The group also met with banking and Austrade representatives to gain a greater understanding of the important role the Japanese market plays for the Australian sugar industry and some insights into the key trade considerations currently at play.

In addition to a busy schedule of customer meetings and facility tours, the group also had time to discover the delights of Japan, including visits to the Meiji Shrine, Imperial Palace Place, Senso-ji Temple, Mt Fuji, Lake Ashi and trip to Nagoya on the famed bullet train.

Tour leader and QSL Executive Manager Marketing and Risk Mark Hampson said the grower study tour was a

very enjoyable initiative that he hoped would become a regular event.

"One of the strengths of QSL is that we have very strong and long-standing relationships with a number of key customers right throughout Asia, so we're uniquely positioned to host these sorts of trade missions," he said.

"I think it's fair to say that our Japanese customers were honoured to host this contingent of Queensland growers and the participating growers gained a fantastic insight into one of their industry's oldest and most important markets.

"There were plenty of new friendships forged and I know that Japan and its people won more than a few hearts, with lots of talk amongst the group of return visits in the future." ■

Pictured: The QSL Grower Study tour to Japan, pictured clockwise from top left, posing in front of Mt Fuji, enjoying a late dinner in Tokyo, inspecting some Queensland sugar ready for processing and meeting with Japanese customers.



Japanese sugar market overview

Sugar consumption in Japan has been stable for the last decade at between 2.3-2.6 million metric tonnes (mt).

Demand is met by local beet and cane production, which totals between 680,000 to 800,000 tonnes per annum, as well as imports of raw sugar of up to 1.4 million tonnes and sugar imported in blended products totalling around 400,000 mt.

Beet sugar accounts for around 80% of Japan's total domestic production and is grown on the northern island of Hokkaido, while cane is mainly grown further south on Okinawa and the islands of Kagoshima. This domestic production is stable and not expected to grow.

High barriers of entry exist to protect Japan's cane and beet industries, with direct imports of refined sugar limited by quota and attracting very high duty. Raw sugar imports are also highly regulated.

OUR EXPORTS TO JAPAN

QSL made its first sale of sugar to Japan in 1954 under the Queensland Sugar Board and the relationship gathered momentum from that point forward, with regular shipments of sugar beginning in 1974. Since then, QSL has sold more than 21 million tonnes of sugar into this important market.

Queensland's key competitor in the Japanese market is Thailand, with Brazil failing to secure significant market share due to the tariffs associated with hi-pol sugar.

Major destinations for Australian sugar are Chiba, Yokohama, Hakata, Moji and Izumiano (not featured on the map, above right, but located close to Osaka).

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These articles contain information of a general or summary nature only and should not be relied on to make any pricing or pool selection decisions. This information does not constitute financial or investment advice, and growers should seek their own independent advice before making any such decisions, in addition to reading the full Pricing Pool Terms which are available on QSL's website. Information about past performance should not be relied on as an indication of future performance, nor should anything in relation to these articles or the Cash Flow Forecast Tool be taken to include representations as to future matters.



QSL CASH FLOW FORECAST TOOL

As we begin a new season, growers using the QSL Direct portal are advised that they can now use the Cash Flow Forecast Tool to generate estimates of their 2018 QSL sugar payments. However, it is very important to note that these estimates are based on indicative pool prices and so will change as the pool price estimate changes throughout the course of the season.

For example, if the market falls from one month to the next, the mark-to-market value of a pool's unpriced sugar will fall, potentially causing a downwards revision in the indicative pool price and any associated QSL Advances payments.

It is also important to be aware that QSL's cash flow forecast tool only provides an estimate of your expected QSL sugar payments. It does not factor in any allowances, deductions, the cane constant, GST payments or CCS adjustments passed on by your miller. This means the estimate provided by the cash flow forecaster may not reflect the actual payment made by QSL, particularly during the season.

The data provided by the cash flow forecasting tool is based on many assumptions and is subject to significant uncertainties, many of which are outside the control of QSL. As such, QSL does not make any representations as to the accuracy of the information derived from the cash flow forecast tool, nor does QSL make any guarantees that this outcome will be achieved.

For these reasons we recommend that Growers using this feature **regularly generate a new forecast** to ensure they are accessing the latest estimate, and continue to bear in mind that it is just that – an estimate only that will change as the season progresses. ■

Policy Update

Environment with Matt Kealley

Industry with Burn Ashburner

Reef Regs - Is there a better way?

CANEGROWERS has some serious concerns about the latest government proposals for additional reef regulations affecting the sugarcane industry. We are strongly opposed to the requirement that nutrient management plans should be regulated and the need for additional sediment loss controls.

For the last 10 years, CANEGROWERS has been working with our leaders, our members, growers, millers, extension staff and the wider sugarcane value chain to improve our sustainability and reduce our impact on the environment and the Great Barrier Reef.

Over the last 5 years, CANEGROWERS has been working with industry, government and stakeholders to set-up and realise long-term positive change that supports on-farm productivity, business viability and sustainable outcomes.

This has involved:

- targeted research on fertiliser and chemicals to understand risk, impact and find better management practices;
- collaborative extension on best management practices to improve productivity and reduce impact on the environment;
- engagement in reef programs to find innovations and speed up on-ground change;
- engagement in strategic planning and governance with Queensland and Australian Government departments on reef plans, science, extension and program delivery;
- engagement on science with industry and reef scientists;
- development of tools and products including record keeping, nutrient management plans, and the championing of a nitrogen road map and Six Easy Steps toolbox for refined nutrient management practices;
- integration of data to inform industry research, extension, training, and reporting;
- implementation of Smartcane BMP which supports productivity, profitability and water quality outcomes;
 - behavioural science through the Cane Changer program to unlock barriers to change; and
 - communication of positive stories and messages that helps "set the record straight".

This is working. The water quality is improving and the buy-in is real. There is belief, there is momentum and there is willingness. Surely this must be better than hitting the industry with further regulations. ■



Chain of Responsibility

CANEGROWERS conducted a series of 10 transport workshops across Queensland's sugarcane districts recently, with the final one held in Ingham on 7 June.

Thanks to all those growers who attended and to the Queensland Transport and Main Roads (TMR) and National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) staff who presented and answered grower questions.

Among the issues addressed by NHVR staff were changes to the Chain of Responsibility (CoR) laws that are scheduled to come into effect in October 2018.

There has been some misinformation surrounding these law changes and it is recommended that growers search "chain of responsibility" on the NHVR website and read the information available on what the changes mean for primary producers.

There are some good fact sheets with FAQ's and videos which bust some of the myths.

It is true that there will be an increased burden on growers, as they do have some additional responsibility under these changed laws.

For example, growers could be held legally liable for breaches of the Heavy Vehicle National Law (HVNL) even though they have no direct role in driving or operating a heavy vehicle.

In addition, corporate entities, directors, partners and managers are accountable for the actions of people under their control. This is the Chain of Responsibility.

NHVR presenters explained that part of addressing these issues could be the addition of some clauses to the grower's current workplace health safety system i.e. the harvesting contractors induction and/or perhaps the agreement with the harvesting contractor.

They were somewhat surprised to discover that many growers did not have formalised WHS documents or harvesting contracts in place. On the other hand, I was pleasantly surprised to find that a number of growers did.

In fact, it was a grower who initially said that the easiest way to cover themselves for harvesting CoR was in the harvesting contractor agreement.

Clearly a written agreement leaves less room for dispute, however, even with a verbal agreement some notes in the diary as to what was agreed is a good idea just to cover yourself.

CANEGROWERS can assist in providing the basis of a harvesting contract for any members that require it. ■

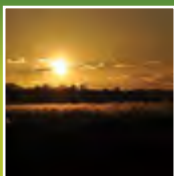




WORKING TOGETHER:

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS | GROWING YOUR INDUSTRY





WORKING TOGETHER

Strong grower focus

CANEGROWERS' strength sits with its members. District boards and a state-wide Policy Council and Board ensure growers have direct input to policy development and company management. The CANEGROWERS network of 13 local offices means that support is always close to you and your business.

Local voice with international reach

When grower voices combine through CANEGROWERS, they have an impact around the state, the nation and the world through memberships and affiliations. CANEGROWERS is an active member of the Queensland Farmers' Federation, National Farmers' Federation, Australian Sugar Industry Alliance, World Association of Beet and Cane Growers and a founding member of the Global Sugar Alliance working for trade liberalisation.

Effective government lobbying

CANEGROWERS is the first port of call for government at all levels for issues relating to sugarcane. When we speak up for you in Brisbane and Canberra, governments listen. Our professional team works tirelessly on your behalf utilising their networks to build relationships with key government officials. At every election campaign, CANEGROWERS ensures that candidates and parties understand the policy positions that will help grow our industry.

Negotiating Cane Supply Agreements

CANEGROWERS multiplies the negotiating power of family farmers, seeking the best conditions and terms for you from the sugar milling companies. Expert local teams are backed up by in-house and experienced legal counsel.

Keeping you informed

All members receive the fortnightly *Australian Canegrower* magazine full of reliable industry news, the key issues we are tackling on your behalf and the latest on productive and profitable cane growing. CANEGROWERS district offices offer training courses and information sessions on important farming and business topics.

WORKING FOR YOU

Achieving marketing choice

CANEGROWERS has fought and won a long campaign for sugar marketing transparency and secured, through legislation, the right of all growers to choose who markets their economic interest sugar. In December 2015 the Queensland Parliament passed amendments to the *Sugar Industry Act 1999* enshrining grower choice in law. These rights have been confirmed through a Federal code of conduct.

Keeping machinery moving

CANEGROWERS members work under a range of gazetted notices and permits to move over-size and over-mass agricultural vehicles on and over public roads in the cane growing regions of Queensland. CANEGROWERS is ensuring this access is maintained as state and federal governments review legislation and regulations – lobbying for improved access and against any moves which may limit farming activity and viability with no benefit to public safety.

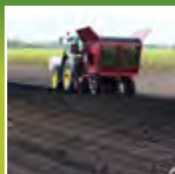
Cost effective water and electricity

CANEGROWERS is relentless in its campaign for fair and reasonable electricity charges, so that every forum and every player in the power industry hears your concerns and is aware of the industry research which identified that the problem lies with network charges, peak demand loads and lack of tariff flexibility.

Workable permits and compliance

CANEGROWERS offices provide accessible and locally relevant advice on a range of topics from fire permits to rat control, safety and payroll management. CANEGROWERS provides assistance with cane auditing and siding management. Specialist legal advice is available to all members.





GROWING YOUR BUSINESS

Smartcane BMP – growing our future

Developed by farmers and industry researchers, this best management practice program is a road map for productivity, profitability and sustainability on Queensland cane farms. Supported by CANEGROWERS, local facilitators will assist you every step of the way.

Representation from CANEGROWERS has guaranteed the Queensland Government's reef regulation compliance program will not target growers accredited in the core modules of Smartcane BMP.

CANEGROWERS proactivity has ensured the program is aligned to the international standard for sustainable sugar, Bonsucro, and is recognised by large corporate sugar purchasers as they move towards sustainability guarantees for their key ingredients.

Access to Reef and water programs

CANEGROWERS has secured millions of dollars in Reef Rescue, Reef Programme and Rural Water Use Efficiency program funding for on farm improvements and projects for growers. CANEGROWERS has a leading role in ensuring sugarcane growers continue to access Reef Trust incentives as the industry meets its obligations under the Reef 2050 Plan.

Tailored insurance solutions

CANEGROWERS provides a quality and comprehensive service, including insurance advice and products broking through eight qualified professionals located in sugarcane regions. Members have access to an exclusive industry-specific crop insurance product underwritten by CGU. No broking fees are charged to CANEGROWERS members.

Competitive fertiliser market

CANEGROWERS shook up the Queensland fertiliser market through its partnership with New Zealand cooperative Ravensdown. While that has ended, the benefits of increased competition and product diversification remain in the marketplace.

GROWING YOUR INDUSTRY

Increasing trade access

CANEGROWERS is active at a national and international level to improve access for Australian sugar into key growing markets through trade agreements which break down barriers. CANEGROWERS is a member of the Global Sugar Alliance, committed to a level playing field for our non-subsidised product.

Supporting research and development

CANEGROWERS supports and influences a targeted and relevant research effort to deliver tangible benefits to our industry through Sugar Research Australia and other organisations.

Through a 35 cents/tonne of cane levy, growers contribute to projects on variety development, nutrient management, pest and disease control and harvesting efficiency. CANEGROWERS works to ensure these funds are spent on the issues of highest priority for growers.

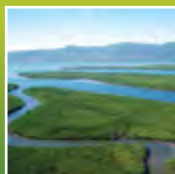
CANEGROWERS encourages the co-ordination of extension activities and efforts across a range of providers.

Effective biosecurity

CANEGROWERS works through Plant Health Australia and is a signatory to the Emergency Pest Plant Response Deed ensuring we are better prepared and able to respond to any biosecurity incursions that could impact your crop and business. CANEGROWERS is championing the development of an industry biosecurity plan.

Labour, skilling and training

CANEGROWERS works with other industry organisations on programs to address labour and skills issues for farmers. This includes offering courses and other learning opportunities for you and your staff.



A BIG INDUSTRY DRIVEN BY GROWER CONFIDENCE



United we stand:

For more than 90 years CANEGROWERS has represented the interests of the sugarcane farmers of Queensland.

Through times of challenge and opportunity, CANEGROWERS has helped family farms and the whole industry to grow and prosper.

CANEGROWERS comprises 13 district companies with offices in all cane regions staffed by dedicated and professional personnel.

CANEGROWERS members are represented by 87 elected members, all sugarcane growers. A 21-person Policy Council provides overall direction while an 8-member Board provides corporate governance.

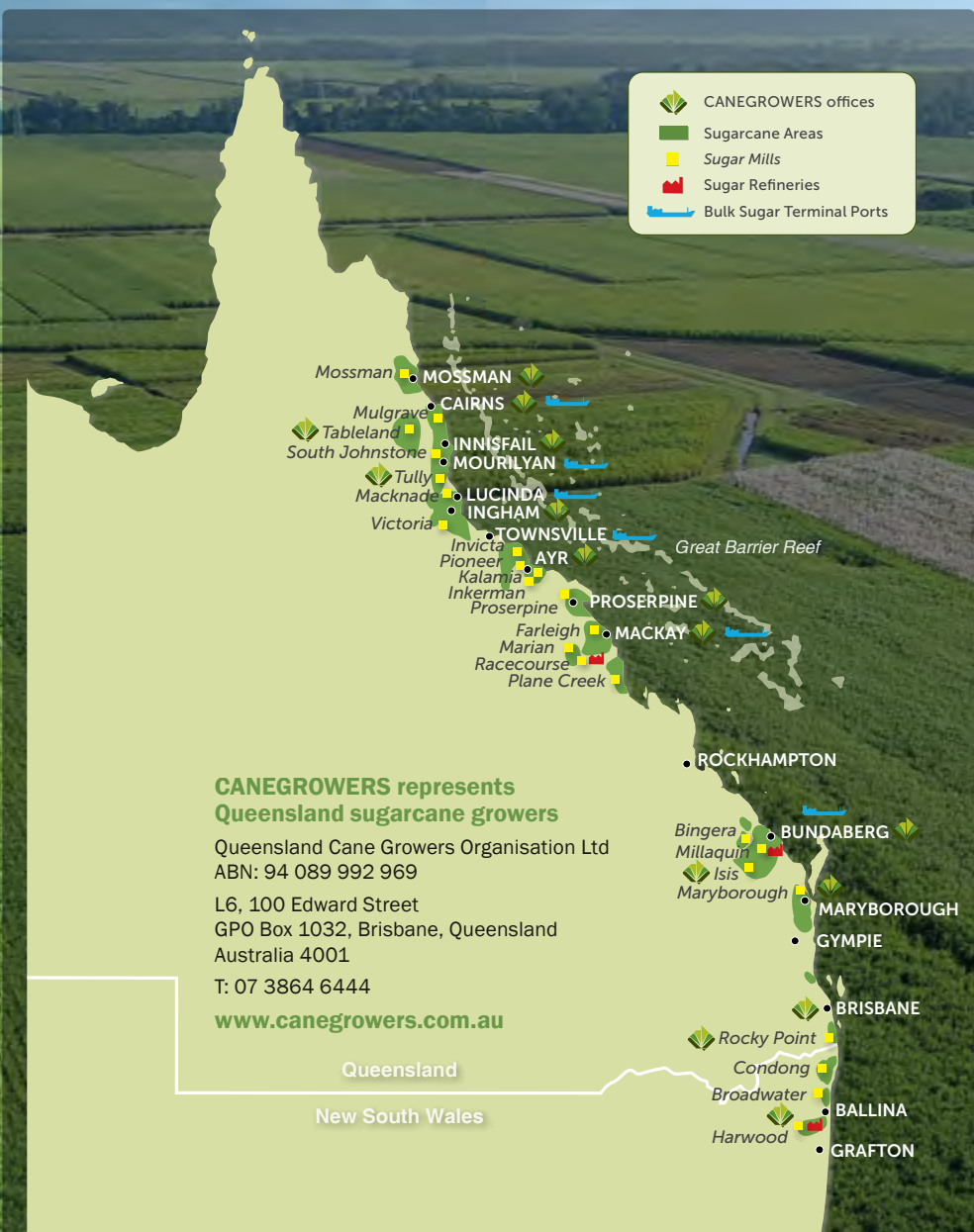
CANEGROWERS is known and respected for its strong voice locally, nationally and internationally — the collective voice of many farmers has a powerful impact.

ADD YOUR VOICE NOW by becoming a member.

Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Ltd
ABN 94 089 992 969

tel: 07 3864 6444 | fax: 07 3864 6429
email: info@canegrowers.com.au
www.canegrowers.com.au

Last update: 13 June 2018.





Warren Males

CANEGROWERS Head – Economics

“All is not doom and gloom, the market is offering opportunities to look forward and capture value for future seasons.”

SUGAR PRICE OPPORTUNITIES

With the 2018 harvest now underway across Queensland, many growers are understandably concerned about the current relatively low sugar prices.

In the spot market, headline prices are below A\$400 per metric tonne. Forward prices are higher.

Below we explore what may impact the outlook and the effect this will have on returns for the 2018 and upcoming seasons.

At the current levels of around US12c/lb, prices on the global market are below the cost of production for all major producers. The market is offering a price incentive to those who can store their sugar for as long as possible and wait for better returns.

A common feature of a surplus market is that the nearby futures price for prompt delivery usually trades at a significant discount to forward prices. For example, while the July 18 position settled at US12.35c/lb on 11 June, the July 20 position settled at US14.06c/lb.

The difference, US1.71c/lb, is worth around A\$50 per metric tonne.

circumstances and measuring these against price opportunities in the short and longer term.

The global production cycle typically lasts for five to six years. Three or four years of surplus are followed by two years of deficit. The high prices we have seen in recent years flow from two years of global production deficit.

The market is now in its second year of surplus sugar. Responding to previously high prices and a good monsoon, India produced a record crop, there is surplus sugar in Pakistan and strong production in Thailand.

At the same time, there has been a surge in European production following the removal of production quotas. These factors have all contributed to the global surplus.

With new plant cane in the ground in India, Pakistan and Thailand, and with



rigidities in the system and rising protectionism slowing the pass-through of low prices to growers in those countries, it is likely to take a couple of years for the surplus to dissipate.

That said, all is not doom and gloom, the

So, while the headlines are all about the low nearby prices, it's best to remember the futures market is offering some relatively higher prices in the forward contracts that can be captured and locked in.

An essential step in managing sugar price risk is understanding costs of production, production risks, business and family

market is offering opportunities to look forward and capture value for future seasons.

In the meantime CANEGROWERS, working closely with the Australian government, is pursuing all avenues to limit the flow of subsidised sugar into the world market. ■



GROWERS GAMBLE ON RICE TO BOOST ON-FARM INCOMES

By Wayne Griffin

With the world sugar price at a three-year low and currently sitting below the cost of production, cane growers across Queensland are looking for ways to boost their bottom line. For many this means cultivating commercial crops on their fallow paddocks, mostly in the form of soybeans, mung beans, chickpeas and other legumes. But for a handful of growers in far north Queensland, rice is proving a popular way to quickly boost on-farm incomes.

Gordonvale cane grower **John Piccolo** planted his first rice crop in 2015 and is looking forward to making it a permanent part of his farming operation.

"We've got 10 hectares of Doongara rice this year," John said when *Australian Canegrower* visited the Piccolo Family farm recently.

"It's a type of dryland long grain rice that we grow for Sun Rice.

"We did our first crop in 2015, it was a winter crop and we irrigated it. Then we did a summer crop in 2016 that we just grew on rain, and this year again has been just wholly on rain."

John, a bricklayer by trade but farmer by birth, has been growing cane all his life. His father Charlie emigrated to Australia in the mid-1920s, working as a cane cutter in the Cairns region before purchasing a small farm of his own in Little Mulgrave.

John grew up working on the farm, before leaving to get his trade as a bricklayer.

"I've spent years working as a sub-contractor around the Cairns region, but I also helped out on the family farm. Then when my father decided to retire my brother and I bought the farm from him and started adding to it, buying other farms around the area. Farming was always in my blood and it was always something I was going to do," John said.

The brothers remained in partnership for 28 years before going their separate ways in 2004.

Today John owns a 60-hectare farm at Gordonvale and leases another 263 hectares, which he runs with his son **Charlie**. They cut over 20,000 tonnes of cane a year, averaging about 80–100 tonnes per hectare.

The father and son team also operate a contract planting and harvesting business, cutting around 90,000 tonnes per year, as well as carrying out contract mowing work for local councils.





"I'm a big believer in diversifying and not having all your eggs in one basket. You have to if you want to survive these days - unless you're one of the very large growers."

"I'm a big believer in diversifying and not having all your eggs in one basket. You have to if you want to survive these days - unless you're one of the very large growers," John said.

"It takes a lot to feed a couple of families on a farm, and that's why we're running the contract harvesting and planting and have the mowing business, and now we're doing the rice - it's all just to make sure we're viable."

It was this philosophy of diversification, not to mention the lure of a quick payday, that drove John and Charlie to get into the rice business to begin with.

"We wanted to do something with our fallow that would give us a return," John said.

"It doesn't do the same job as soybeans or mung beans in terms of getting that nitrogen fix for the soil, because rice is basically a grass like cane, but it does change the structure and biology of the soil. It makes the soil more pliable.

"But by far the biggest benefit is the turnaround time. It's pretty much a



Pictured: Gordonvale cane growers John and Charlie Piccolo started cultivating rice in 2015. This year they'll harvest 10 hectares of Doongara long grain rice, which they'll supply to SunRice's Brandon Mill outside Townsville. As well as growing cane, rice and mung beans, John and his son Charlie also operate contract planting, harvesting and mowing businesses.



"But by far the biggest benefit is the turnaround time. It's pretty much a 140-day crop from plant to harvest and we will usually get paid in full within 30 days of delivery."

140-day crop from plant to harvest and we will usually get paid in full within 30 days of delivering it to the Sun Rice mill at Brandon, outside Townsville. It's not like a cane crop where you're waiting two years to get your final pay.

"What we've found to date, and bearing in mind this is only our third crop, it seems to be a decent return, especially when you look at the sugar price at the minute, 12-14c per lb - rice stacks up pretty well against that."

However, even John will admit there's a lot more work involved in cultivating rice, not to mention a lot more risk.

"It's a dryland rice we grow, so even though it doesn't need to grow in paddies, it still needs a lot of water. It needs water to strike properly, it's got to have water to throw tillers, it's got to have water to reach pinnacle initiation and it's got to have water to fill.

"Then, once all that has happened, it's got to have dry weather to dry out for harvest. So, we're in the lap of the weather gods really.

"In a sense we might be in the wrong kind of region for it here in the tropics. We get enough rain, maybe a bit too much, but the weather can be unpredictable, and

rice is probably more suited to a bit more of a stable predictable weather pattern."

As well as requiring a lot of water, rice is also an input intensive crop and is particularly susceptible to pests.

"We do pre-fertilising and then we plant with a seeder. Then you've got a pre-emergent to stop the grass and weeds from coming up in it. After that you've really got to keep the moisture up to it, either by rainfall or irrigation.

"You've got to fertilise again at tillering stage and then again at the pinnacle initiation stage, and you've got to keep your fungi out of it and keep your pests out too.

"So, there's a bit of spraying in it, with fungicides, pesticides and herbicides, and if you can't do it with a tractor you've got to do it with a plane, which is the way we did most of it this year.

"It's pretty intensive compared to the cane. Timing is really important with rice and you've really got to be on the ball with it."

Even if you get everything right, you're still at the mercy of the weather, with rice being much less resilient than cane, John says.



"It's a lot riskier than cane, that's for sure. With cane you can go through a cyclone, a flood, a drought and you'll still get something out of it. But with the rice you won't – so it's definitely more of a gamble.

"But you've also got to remember that in five to six months you've gone from planting to money in the bank. We have a contract with Sun Rice and we know how much we're going to get paid before the crop is planted. We've had two successful crops so far. Hopefully the third one is successful."

As harvest ramps up around the state, growers are anxiously watching the global sugar price, which looks set to remain low for some time due to an oversupply in the market.

While John and Charlie are frustrated at what they believe is the dumping of subsidised sugar onto the global market by other countries, driving prices down, they also see problems closer to home.

"When you look at the way things have gone in recent years with the millers and the marketing issues and cane supply agreements and now with the price of sugar being so low, I feel the direction of the sugar industry is changing very

rapidly and I'm not sure if it's going to be in our favour," John said.

"In our area, and this may be the same in other regions across the industry, the rationalisation of milling areas means we're going to longer season lengths, which is taking a lot of money out of our top line because of low CCS caused by long seasons.

"And that comes down in a large part to the mill operation. The money isn't being spent on the infrastructure which is extending the length of the season and costing growers money.

"This mill area used to be the envy of the entire industry 40 years ago. The mill was the top one in Queensland in terms of crushing capacity, CCS, but now it's near the bottom. When you've got a mill that could crush an average of 500 tonnes an hour up until eight or nine years ago and now it's dropped down to 420 – 430 tonnes an hour, you know there's a problem.

"They blame the fibre in the cane, but we don't breed the varieties of cane, we only plant what we're presented with and the mill has a lot of input into the varieties we're allowed to grow. So, I feel there's no point in blaming the fibre in

the cane. The mill just hasn't put in the capital expenditure to be able to process the cane.

"And there's a lot of farmers that feel the same as me, but just aren't game to say it – well, I will. Long season lengths are a killer of the sugar industry."

Despite his concerns about the industry, John, who is also a CANEGROWERS Cairns Region Director, has no plans to turn his back on sugarcane at this stage.

"I'm not saying that rice, or mung beans or any other crop, is going to be the saviour, but I do feel that we need to diversify and not have all our eggs in one basket," John said.

"But I've also been growing sugarcane all my life and I'll keep growing cane while looking for another source of income that will give me a higher net return.

"As for any thoughts of expanding the rice, it's early days. I like the rice and we're pretty confident and excited that we can make it a success. And there is definitely capacity there to grow and sell more, but we'll just wait a bit and see how it goes over the next few seasons. We're not going to give it the tick just yet." ■

Pictured: Charlie carries out some repairs in preparation for harvest.

In a statement provided to *Australian Canegrower*, Mulgrave Mill Manager **Chris Hoare** disputed claims that MSF Sugar had failed to invest in mill infrastructure.

"The mill supports the varieties recommended for the region by SRA and 'tonnes per hour' is not a good reflection of mill crushing capacity," Mr Hoare said.

"Mulgrave Mill is crushing double the amount of cane when compared to 40 years ago so the problem isn't the fibre that we're getting from the cane, it's the excess bagasse generated through this increase in throughput.

"MSF Sugar has in fact invested heavily into Mulgrave Mill. Since last year's crush, significant investment has been made with \$6.5m in capital investment and \$12.4m in maintenance to existing plant."

QUEENSLAND SUGAR INDUSTRY **A WORLD LEADER**



Queensland's sugarcane industry continues to push itself to remain one of the most innovative and progressive cane industries in the world.

There has been a significant acceleration in recent years in the adoption of best management practices that simultaneously boost productivity and profitability while reducing environmental impacts.

Farmers have embraced the Australian Government's Reef Programme and its many funding opportunities, which has encouraged and enabled broadscale changes in the state's cane industry, resulting in positive outcomes for farmers and the environment alike.

Babinda grower **Lindsay Travers** was one of several Cairns region farmers who teamed up to design, build and trial a unique variable rate applicator to reduce inorganic nitrogen inputs, thanks to funding from the Australian Government Reef Programme. Lindsay said while he believed the nitrogen reduction targets in the government's reef plan were ambitious, he was confident significant reductions were achievable. "They want to reduce nitrogen by 80 per cent, which is a little bit high, but even if we can cut it down to 50 per cent that would be a massive achievement and it's possible through projects like this," he said.

The sugar industry has undergone a revolution over the past two decades with farming practices being closely scrutinised as government's look to manage run-off and environmental impact from farms as part of the Reef 2050 Long Term Sustainability Plan to care for and protect the Great Barrier Reef.

CANEGROWERS Chairman **Paul Schembri** says there is no doubt that farmers want a healthy and sustainable industry and that means a healthy and sustainable reef also.

"This is our environment as much as it is any Australian's. We are committed to playing our part to ensuring its future. We have a good story to tell and we need to be proactive in ensuring that the community understands we are making headway towards environmental sustainability," Paul said.

CANEGROWERS members have been doing remarkable things when it comes to protecting and caring for their environment, trialling new farming practices and innovative solutions to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon.

For decades now many of Queensland's farmers have been green cane harvesting and trash blanketing their crops, shifting to GPS-controlled traffic farming, fallow cropping, employing precision application of chemicals and nutrients, and using best practice irrigation and drainage techniques.

Over the years the CANEGROWERS magazine has featured some of the remarkable efforts of our members to lead by example, as well as appear in our Virtual Bus Tour series which shows firsthand the passion of our members to embrace best management practices.

Home Hill cane farmer **Aaron Linton** received Reef Programme funding to trial a new drip irrigation system against traditional furrow irrigation. In Season 6, Episode 6 of the Virtual Bus Tour, Aaron discussed the benefits of using sub-surface drip tape, including being able to better target water and fertiliser with the fully automated system, thereby avoiding excess run-off in nearby waterways.

ON INNOVATION



CANEGROWERS CEO Dan Galligan said the high levels of engagement in government reef programs, and the accreditation of close to 300 cane farmers covering 17 per cent of the state's sugarcane farm land in the Smartcane BMP program, clearly showed that growers were working hard to care for their environment, while also making gains for their bottom line.

"When growers, government and the science community work together, there is no doubt we can achieve our common goal of ensuring that farming beside the reef can be sustainable and provide a future for generations to come," Dan said.

The Queensland Government has also shown its support, recognising the importance of an industry which "is a cornerstone of many Queensland regional communities" injecting millions of dollars into the economy each year and providing significant employment opportunities.

In 2017, then Queensland Environment Minister **Steven Miles** signed a Cane Changer commitment acknowledging the ongoing efforts of cane growers to improve farming practices, especially in relation to the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

With the Reef Programme coming to an end this month, it is timely to recognise and celebrate the shared efforts of our industry to embrace the role of environmental custodians. We look forward to showcasing more of our member's stories in a special online feature which will be launched in the next edition of the CANEGROWER magazine. ■

Pictured: Babinda grower Lindsay Travers—one of several Cairns region farmers who teamed up to design, build and trial a unique variable rate applicator to reduce inorganic nitrogen inputs.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS KEY TO SUCCESS

MSF Sugar's Mulgrave Mill and the Wet Tropics Management Authority are working together to eradicate the invasive yellow crazy ant. The two organisations are collaborating to ensure agricultural threats made by yellow crazy ants are identified and protocols are in place to protect local crops.

A recent contractor meeting saw the drafting of machinery movement protocols in and out of the infestation area. This document is just in time for the start of the 2018 crushing season and formalises the processes already in place by contractors operating in the area.



Photo: Wet Tropics Images

With 40% of the total yellow crazy ant infestation area in sugarcane, it's vital the Yellow Crazy Ant Eradication Program (YCA Program) is engaged with industry to achieve the long-term goal of eradication.

To ensure extensive consultation, cane supply field officer at Mulgrave Mill Matt Hession has been working closely with the program.

"I've seen first-hand the invasiveness of these ants on a number of farms; it's quite a confronting experience. For this eradication program to be successful, it's important the growers, contractors and Mulgrave Mill collaborate closely with the YCA Program to determine protocols and provide opportunities for staff and contractors to receive ant identification training."

Since 2014, the Wet Tropics Management Authority has treated a large number of sugarcane farms that border the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. As a result ant numbers have reduced significantly.

Farmers and contractors impacted by this pest continue to work with the program to ensure eradication of ants from their farms and the surrounding rainforest and creeks.

Please contact the Wet Tropics Management Authority to report suspect ants.

Telephone: (07) 4241 0525

Email: yca@wtma.qld.gov.au

Website: www.wettropics.gov.au/yellow-crazy-ants



IRRIGATION EFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT



Mackay's cane growers are used to making tough decisions about when to irrigate to get the best performance out of their crops while remaining profitable and protecting their environment.

The Mackay industry, representing nearly one third of Queensland's sugar production, has been feeling the pressure from all sides with limited rainfall, rising costs for irrigation water, fuel and electricity, urban growth and a lack of local labour.

Mackay Area Productivity Services (MAPS) Senior Extension Officer **Dave McCallum** said despite all these challenges, the local sugar industry remained determined and progressive.

"Growers in this region have had to contend with a number of hurdles in recent decades, but it is reassuring to see so many of them embracing environmental and productivity best management practices to ensure they can not only survive but also thrive in today's world," Dave said.

"Irrigation remains one of the biggest challenges for farmers in the Mackay region, which has a predominantly rain-fed sugarcane production system but often experiences drought-like conditions at peak growing times.

"Mackay's sugar industry has invested substantial capital into several major water infrastructures in the region

including dams, weirs and channels to ensure we have an adequate supply of water to draw on when needed.

"However rising costs of irrigation water, electricity and fuel, as well as more stringent farming practices relating to run-off into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, means that farmers need to be smarter than ever about their irrigation practices if they want to remain in the game."

"Irrigation remains one of the biggest challenges for farmers in the Mackay region, which has a predominantly rain-fed sugarcane production system but often experiences drought-like conditions at peak growing times."

Best practice irrigation management is about applying sufficient water for crop growth while minimising the amount of excess water lost as either run-off or deep drainage. Irrigation water can often be a conduit for the movement of pesticides, nutrients and sediments off farm making it critical that farmers have a well-designed and managed system in place. Conversely, timely, adequate irrigation can improve the incorporation of herbicides, fertiliser and pesticides, reducing the possibility of their movement with heavy rainfall events.

After another dry start to 2018 in the Mackay region, many farmers found themselves forced to irrigate to save their crops despite the excessive cost of electricity in North Queensland.

"Farmers are well aware of the positive economic benefits that come from minimising costs, increasing efficiencies and improving productivity," Dave said.

"They also know the mantra – you need the right amount of water at the right time to get the best results, for their farm and for the environment.

"Today, farmers can make that decision based on data from on-farm and also



"Rising costs of irrigation water, electricity and fuel, as well as more stringent farming practices relating to run-off into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon, mean that farmers need to be smarter than ever about their irrigation practices if they want to remain in the game."



Pictured: (left) Rob Townsend's irrigation equipment was modified for pumping efficiency; (above) Local cane grower Dave Vella took advantage of the on-farm irrigation assessments on offer; (right) Mackay Area Productivity Services Senior Extension Officer Dave McCallum.

district-wide, giving them the best chance to maintain optimum growth throughout the season and ideally avoiding excess run-off, loss of fertilisers and chemicals, or crop stress."

Programs such as the Queensland Government's Rural Water Use Efficiency for Irrigation Futures (RWUE-IF) are supporting farmers to access the latest technology and information to make more-informed decisions regarding their use and management of on-farm irrigation.

The RWUE-IF is an industry-delivered, government-funded program promoting water and energy efficiencies through contemporary best practices in water management and the use of more energy efficient irrigation systems. Over the years the program has resulted in significant savings for irrigators across several industries, including sugar cane, resulting in less water being used and energy savings thanks to more efficient pumps, and more efficient application techniques.

The most recent RWUE-IF funding round saw funds directed to the Mackay region for on-farm irrigation pump assessments and technical water management advice,

delivered by experienced irrigation consultants, to help farmers benefit from new and improved irrigation practices.

"Part of our work lately has been to undertake on-farm irrigation pump assessments and to develop individual irrigation schedules for farmers based on their unique circumstances," Dave said.

"Both options have the potential to save thousands of dollars through reduced water and energy usage, increased crop yield and a reduction of chemical and fertiliser losses — who wouldn't want that?"

Dave said 14 on-farm pump assessments had been completed in the district over the past few years.

"While the response has been good, I would like to see more farmers taking up this opportunity and challenge, to see how they can benefit from the assistance at hand," he said.

"The irrigation pump assessments take a few hours and involves an independent consultant coming to the farm, viewing the pumping and irrigation equipment, and possibly running the equipment for a short time. Sometimes we find several things that can be improved or changed,

Continued page 20 ►

"While the response has been good, I would like to see more farmers taking up this opportunity and challenge, to see how they can benefit from the assistance at hand."

sometimes we find the pumping gear is operating pretty well, but in the end farmers have nothing to lose by having us come out to them and talk about their irrigation practices."

Earlier this year MAPS, in conjunction with the Plane Creek Productivity Board, ran a series of public on-farm pump assessments with an irrigation expert. These were followed by workshops in both areas, discussing the results, as well as other common inefficiency causes, tariffs, irrigation scheduling tools, software and new technology.

Local cane grower **Dave Vella** is one farmer who has taken advantage of the on-farm irrigation assessments on offer. MAPS organised a consultant to visit Dave's farm to see how he could improve the efficiency of his Kelly & Lewis pump.

Powered by a 50KW motor, the pump is on a bore at his Palmyra farm, operating a high-pressure winch. Dave said he was having to run the equipment with the gate valve throttled back, resulting in too high pressure at the pump and a reduced flow rate, meaning more money being spent on already high power bills.

The consultant suggested trimming the pump's impellor in order to open the valve and increase the flow rate, but Dave decided to purchase a new pump due to the existing pump's age. A new Stalker pump 80x50-250 with trimmed impellor was installed, reducing power usage from 57 amp to 38 amp and increasing the flow rate from 15lit/sec to 23 lit/sec. Running the new pump on the low tariff means Dave is now saving \$20/ML.

Dave said whether it was through the individual assessments or public workshops held in the district, there were plenty of opportunities for farmers to benefit.



Mackay sugarcane grower **Rob Townsend** from Victoria Plains also took up the offer of an irrigation pump assessment on his farm.

Another Mackay sugarcane grower who took up the offer of an irrigation pump assessment on his farm was **Rob Townsend** from Victoria Plains.

Rob was running a Southern Cross 100x65-250 with 45KW motor, operating a high pressure winch, using Kinchant Dam water from a pipeline. Due to elevation differences on the farm and the added complication of other irrigators also drawing off the pipeline, Rob was not able to fully open his delivery valve.

A new variable speed drive could have been installed, but a cheaper option was to trim back the impellor from 264mm to 230mm. The impellor was removed and trimmed to 240mm which has improved pumping efficiency, and reduced Rob's irrigation costs by \$15/ML. The consultant also identified other issues with the suction and delivery pipework which if rectified could further improve the pumping efficiency.

"While having the right irrigation equipment is crucial, knowing when to irrigate is just as critical; irrigation scheduling is about ensuring the moisture level in the soil stays in the "Readily Available Water" zone to maximise crop growth," Dave said.

Detailed crop modelling based on soil properties, crop growth requirements and monitoring of soil moisture and weather forecasts are used to develop 'best-practice' irrigation schedules specific to each farm, giving farmers the best chance

of making the right choices about when, where and how much water to use.

Irrigation scheduling tools such as GDotS and EnviroProbes are being used in the Mackay region, with MAPS setting up probes in 12 paddocks around the region to collect data accessible to all growers through the MAPS website. Each probe relays the data collected to the internet for monitoring and viewing on a computer or smart phone whenever the farmer chooses.

"The first step is knowing what resources are available to be used, but the most important step is actually using those resources to help make the best decisions you can for your farm," Dave said.

"There is no doubt that irrigating is expensive, and often farmers are reluctant to spend more money on changing their irrigating practices, however they could be missing out on significant savings in the long run if they don't."

Dave said programs such as the RWUE-IF were vital if Queensland was to have an efficient and viable agricultural sector that can continue to grow and prosper.

"Everybody needs a little incentive and encouragement now and again and if this program can help to continue the groundswell of support for best management irrigation practice then I certainly hope we see it continue long into the future," he said. ■

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Classifieds

Mossman-Tully

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2016 KUHN VB2265 ROUND BALER \$50,000 incl GST. Excellent condition, latest model, extra HD silage spec model, low bale count, drop floor, flotation tyres, ISOBUS, approx 60 hours use in non-abrasive conditions, always shedded, factory warranty to 11/2019, \$50,000 incl GST. Ph. 0414 604 974

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International 786 100HP 3468 hrs gc \$8,500 + gst; HBM stick planter with 2xtrailers and hot water crates \$900; 5-leg ripper with crumble roller \$2,800 + gst; 2000L fuel tank on 2m stand \$900; 1x1m cement blocks \$75 each. L&R crop divider saws \$600. Ph. 0447 183 182

20,000 litre iron tank in good condition, Suitable for fuel storage. Ingham Area. Contact 07 47774650 or Mob 0427 196 306 JD4455 Power shift \$30,000 inc. Plus Delta offset with Drum Roller, 7 Leg Ripper with Crumbler Roller, One tonne Bonel Fertilizer box side dresser, MF 188, MF 35X and many other implements. Ph. 0409 484 178

Mackay-Proserpine

Hodge 3 row stool splitter and confidor applicator. Double disc openers, galvanised box and stainless steel worm. VGC. \$28,500. Ph. 0427 597 356 or 0435 550 737

Howard Crumble Roller, 4m long (bolts together at centre), brand new still in crate, fits rear tool bar of Howard CH2365DT Rotaryhoe, \$4,422 GST inc. Ph. 0428236165 12T self-propelled 6x6 elev infielder VGC. 6t side/tipper on Leyland tandem GC. Don Mizzi 741 model on Fiat 750 special turbo plus MF102 half-tracks to suit. Howard rotary hoe HR40, 255cm wide - GC. Celli Tiger spike hoe, 2.5m wide with hydraulic crumble roller and oil cooler - VGC. 0438 606 578 (Mackay)

Bundaberg-Rocky Point

Howard 90" AH3-230 Rotary Hoe. All rubber shrouds depth wheels near new condition still on original blades heavy duty 170 hp gearbox. Always stored out of weather. Ph. 0439 930 455

Bonnell Trash Incorporator \$5,750; Trailco Water Winch \$8,750; International Tractor 766 \$6,750 (all GST inclusive) Ph. 0419 577 110

2011 M135X Kubota fwd tractor. 135hp, one owner since new with only 2500hrs. Full led light set up and always shedded and serviced regularly. \$45,000 neg. Ph. Nick 0401 084 763

Bonell cane trash blower with topper - \$2000 ono. Bonell cane plant cutter - \$2000 ono. Cane Country trash planter - \$500 ono. Ph. 0407 269 960

Tractor tyre brand new 520-70R30 Trelleborg high speed tyre suit JCB Fastrac \$2,200 (new price is \$3,000). Ph. 0413 584 728

Wanted

Wanted - Ford New Holland 6640 2wd with air cab. Ph. 0408 870 182

Wanted: Side Dresser Fertiliser Rig for Trash Blanket. Ph. 0417 868 377

Bonell Whole Stick Trash Planter with Suscon Box. Ground Wheel Drive. Ph. 0428 198 312

Wanted STL Shares. Ph. 0419 717 006

Rainfall Report

brought to you by AustSafe Super

	Recorded rainfall (mm)			Average rainfall (mm)
Location	7 days to 9am		Year to date	January–June
	04.06.18	11.06.18		
Mossman	2	0	2015	1724
Mareeba AP	0.6	0	650	717
Cairns	5	0	1896	1598
Mt Sophia	13	7	3119	2577
Babinda	0	0	1460	3261
Innisfail	24	8	2631	2714
Tully	10	11	2635	3154
Cardwell	2	4	1341	1655
Lucinda	4	6	1377	1653
Ingham	Tce	8	1566	1555
Abergowrie	6	2	1621	1429
Townsville	0.6	0.2	738	868
Ayr DPI	0	0	571	712
Proserpine	0.8	0.6	802	1027
Mirani	0.4	3	598	1118
Mackay	0.4	7	642	1169
Sarina (Plane Ck)	2	6	779	1282
Bundaberg	0.6	0.6	430	610
Childers South	1	0.8	565	513
Maryborough	0.4	0	584	728
Tewantin	18	30	839	1131
Eumundi	18	31	927	1095
Nambour	21	14	729	1085
Woongoolba	11	62	676	834
Murwillumbah	0	27	484	1035
Ballina	16	99	925	1146
Woodburn	0.4	38	595	878



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Zero indicates either no rain or no report was sent. These rainfall figures are subject to verification and may be updated later. Weather forecasts, radar and satellite images and other information for the farming community can be accessed on www.bom.gov.au. Weather report provided by the Bureau of Meteorology's Commercial Weather Services Unit.

Wanted to Buy: Belly Roller and 10ft Roller.
Ph. 07 4777 3154 a/h

Wanted to Buy: Massey Ferguson 165 used
Rear tyre – 14 x 9 x 38. Ph. 07 4056 2821

Work Wanted

Looking for work in the Mackay region
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aspects of haulout. Ph. Dave 0400 051 438

Looking for work for a few days a week on
a farm during the crushing session, diesel
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keen to work and help out where needed.
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Cane farm Tarakan Road ABERGOWRIE
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phone 07 4777 4633 or 0408 608 664

600 acres Cane & Cattle – Sarina, 9 Titles,
2 Large Houses, 2 Sheds, Near new Tractors
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Sarina. Ph. 0418186525

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Cane Farm Cone Creek Road MT CHRISTIAN.
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2 dams. Genuine offers/enquiries only.
Ph. 0428 852 279

Cane farm PROSERPINE 199 hectares total
155 hectares under cane. 2018 crop 10500
ton approx. 495megs of water. 2x hardhoses
and half of the farm is flood irrigated. Farm
comes with machinery. 3 houses on the farm
main house is fully airconed and has a large
swimming pool. 0400 794 857

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