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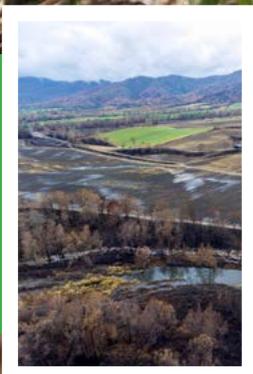


SUGARCANE PLANTING INNOVATION

Soybean fallow, minimum till and tractor automation helps grower save time and money while improving soil health



Bio-precinct dream a step closer as Mossman Mill project gets \$25m



Life slowly returns to normal for growers impacted by bushfires



League legend urges cane growers to put safety first in 2019

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CONTENTS

14 January 2019



8



14



5



6



18



4

Features

- 4 Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement
- 6 Rain breathes new life into fire-ravaged cane farms
- 7 Establishing sugarcane farming systems
- 8 Minister continues commitment to growers
- 14 Planting innovation changes
- 18 Think safety this season
- 20 CANEGROWERS Policy update
- 21 Code of Conduct

Also inside:

- 2 Chairman's comment
- 4 News in brief
- 10 QSL report
- 23 Classifieds
- 24 Rainfall report

COVER IMAGE: Plane Creek grower Doug Pedersen's farm. Read more on page 14.

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A year of challenges and opportunities

By Paul Schembri, Chairman CANEGROWERS

As we take our first steps into 2019, the one thing we can be certain about is that things will be uncertain – old challenges will revisit us and new ones will emerge. But, regardless of uncertainty, each new year brings with it fresh hope for a better season for the Australian sugarcane industry.

First and foremost, our hopes are always tied to our crop, people, CCS and the world sugar price.

Queensland's 2019 cane crop has already been subjected to all sorts of weather – both wet and dry.

Only a brave man would be foolish enough to make a prediction at this early stage. However, it looks likely that cyclonic activity will have some impact in the northern regions, while dry conditions continue to impact production across the southern growing regions.

As for the sugar price, current levels are well below our costs of production but actions that we and other countries are taking may deal with one factor behind the the low sugar prices.

It is our view that the current low world sugar price is due, in large part, to India's plan to export subsidised sugar. It is Australia's view that the subsidies are in clear breach of World Trade Organisation rules and need to be reduced by the Indian Government.

Australia along with Brazil, Thailand, Canada, Columbia, Guatemala and South Africa is considering escalating our dispute with India into a formal legal challenge before a WTO dispute panel.

Brazil has already signalled its intention to move to a dispute panel and Australia and other countries should follow in the next few months.

It is important to attract as much global support as possible to rein in these subsidies.

There is an old saying which I often quote, "If you want to go fast, travel alone. If you want to go far, travel together". It will take time to recruit many countries to this cause – but the effort will be worth it in the fullness of time.

With a Federal Election due by May, 2019 will be a pivotal year for the Australian sugar industry.

Elections are critically important in ensuring that governments or prospective governments understand loud and clear the policy needs of cane growers.

CANEGROWERS will focus on these key issues in the upcoming election.

Firstly, we need to ensure that the Sugar Code of Conduct, recently retained by the current government, is not dismantled. The Code is essential to producing fair commercial outcomes for growers.

Secondly, we need to continue to agitate for lower electricity prices.

A farmer in one of our southern regions recently told me of the emotional pain he was experiencing by turning off his pumps. His crops desperately need water but he could not afford the cost of electricity to apply that water.

It saddens me that the debate around electricity prices has been reduced to a debate about who caused the problem rather than how we collectively fix it.

Thirdly, the sugar industry will continue to advocate strongly against a tax on sugar as a food or drink ingredient.

Not only would a sugar tax cause enormous reputational damage to our industry, it is also a simplistic and ineffective approach to a complex health problem.

Finally, 2019 will be a defining year for key regions of our industry. Mackay Sugar, and the 800 grower shareholders who supply and own the business, will consider a proposal to partner with European sugar producer Nordzucker to secure Mackay Sugar's future. At the time of writing this column we need

to be mindful that Nordzucker has not yet given the final green light for the proposal.

The proposal represents a great opportunity for Mackay Sugar to pay down debt and reinvest in milling reliability, while still retaining an ownership stake in the business. I am confident that Mackay Sugar growers/ shareholders will assess the proposal carefully and vote accordingly.

In the Mossman and Tableland regions, growers are working to take ownership of the Mossman Mill, thanks to funding commitments from both the Queensland and Federal governments.

The business plan also provides for the construction of a bio refinery. While there are still many assessments and evaluations yet to be finalised, I'm confident that the growers of Mossman and Tableland will be successful.

2019 represents many threats and challenges, but equally many opportunities for the Australian sugarcane industry. ■



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If something goes wrong and you need to report a claim, we are here to assist you during the claims process.

Contact your local CANEGROWERS Office to discover how WE CAN HELP YOU!

NEWS IN BRIEF

New year brings in TPP-11

Australia's trading landscape changed on 30 December 2018 as the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement took effect.

As well as being Australia's first trade agreement with Canada and Mexico, opening up new opportunities with those two nations, it also improved trading conditions with other member nations.

"Opportunities for Australian exporters are vast," Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said.

"From our wine producers in South Australia's Barossa Valley to our dairy farmers in Victoria and our sugarcane farmers in Queensland, the TPP-11 will open more doors for Australian farmers and businesses."

For the sugar industry, there is now a chance to export to Vietnam, Mexico and Canada and there will be lower import duties on sugar sold into Japan.

The agreement eliminates 98% of tariffs in the trade zone of member nations which have a combined GDP of \$13.7 trillion.

Australia, Canada, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Singapore and Vietnam have so far signed the pact with Brunei, Chili, Malaysia and Peru expected to sign soon. President Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the TPP soon after taking office in 2017. ■

Burdekin teen takes out organic grower award

Daniel Spotswood has been awarded the Australian Junior Organic Farmer Leader of the Year Award, taking out the prestigious title during a presentation dinner in Canberra recently.

The 19-year-old, who is currently studying a Cert Three in Agriculture, has grown up working on the family's organic cane,

cattle and vegetable farm at Inkerman.

The Spotswood family use bio-fertiliser and homemade fertiliser, which they spray on to vegetables and cane planted on any of the farm's certified organic paddocks.

"My grandfather and great grandfather weren't organic. I took a lot of paperwork, converting the entire farm to be chemical-free," Mr Spotswood said.

"I didn't think I was going to get (this award), I wasn't expecting it as I am only 19. Mum and Dad were both very impressed. They were very proud." ■



Pictured: Fourth generation grower Daniel Spotswood (right) has grown up working on the family's Mt Alma Organic Farm. Pictured with his dad, Gary.

2019 CANEGROWERS ELECTION

Nominations will open later this month for the CANEGROWERS triennial election process.

The election is for all Board positions across the 13 CANEGROWERS district companies in Queensland from Rocky Point to Mossman.

These Boards then nominate members of the CANEGROWERS Queensland Policy Council.

Men and women of all ages involved in a Member cane growing business are encouraged to stand as candidates.

The first step towards nomination is to contact your local Chairman or Manager.

The ballot will be in March with the new Boards commencing on 1 May. ■

GAS PERMITS EXPIRE

The New Year has brought some welcome news for the community and agricultural organisations concerned about potential shale gas extraction in the Wide Bay Burnett region.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines has informed the Lock the Gate Alliance that two Blue Energy gas permits that were due for renewal on 31 December have expired and will not be renewed.

A third permit will expire on 31 March and cannot be renewed.

Vicki Perrin from the Alliance said the decision followed five years of opposition to Blue Energy's plans.

"This outcome shows that unified communities have the power to defend themselves from gas fracking," she said.

"Farmers, industry groups, Traditional Owners, tourism operators and town residents have all stood as one and put our sustainable industries and our environment above gas industry profits.

"We're now calling on the Queensland Government to provide permanent protection for the region, to ensure there will be no new proposals for gas fracking in the future in this region." ■

Bio-precinct dream a step closer to reality

The Queensland Government has agreed to tip in \$25 million to support a bid by far north Queensland cane growers to purchase the struggling Mossman Mill and turn it into the state's first bio-precinct.

The funding announcement on 21 December was an early Christmas gift for grower representatives who have spent months completing a business case and lobbying government officials at state and federal level.

In November, the Federal Government committed \$20 million to the purchase and upgrade of the mill, conditional on a 'significant contribution' from the Queensland Government.

The latest funding commitment virtually guarantees the purchase will go ahead, Far Northern Milling's Liza Giudici said.

"There's still a bit of work to be done. Unfortunately funding applications aren't as simple as just handing over the cheque but we're confident now that everything is falling into place and the project is going ahead as planned."

Mrs Giudici, who is also a Director of CANEGROWERS Mossman, thanked local Mossman and Tableland growers for their ongoing support throughout the negotiations.

"We're grateful to the state and federal governments for coming to the table with the funding to make this possible," she said.

"But I think it's really important that we recognise and thank the growers for sticking with us and their continued support of the project.

"Their dedication to ensuring we have a good crop has been hugely important. They've probably spent upwards of \$20 million on planting, fertilising and everything else that goes with it. That's a huge commitment when you consider that half way through the year we weren't even sure if we would have a mill in 2019."

In order to secure State Government funding, grower representatives had to de-risk the project by demonstrating the mill's ability to diversify and eventually cease the export of raw sugar, therefore ending the company's exposure to the volatile world sugar price.

"For the first three years the mill will operate in the traditional manner and the export of raw sugar will continue," Mrs Giudici said.

"That will give us the time to transition into the value-adding side, so basically producing different products, such as biofuels or bioplastics, from raw sugar, molasses, bagasse, but no longer exporting on the world market."

With the end now in sight, Ms Giudici said everyone involved was looking forward to taking a break.

"It's been 20 months now that we've been driving this. I think we're all a bit tired and looking forward to a break when it's all over."

■



CANEGROWERS Mossman board director Liza Giudici.



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Rain breathes new life into fire-ravaged cane farms

Seven weeks on from the devastating bushfires that destroyed more than 800 hectares of sugarcane around Mackay's Pioneer Valley, life is gradually getting back to normal for affected growers.

Almost 300 mm of rain has fallen in the area over the past six weeks, breathing new life into cane paddocks consumed by fire in late November.

Burnie Ward, who in addition to losing 61 ha of cane, also saw his sheds and machinery go up in flames, said the recent rain brought hope back to growers in the area.

"We had a storm come through just after the fire and we've had a good bit of rain since then, so the cane has shot back up and is looking really good. Everything is very green now," Burnie said.

"It's still a good way behind the rest of the crop but it's waist high and even chest high in some places. Compared to where it was five or six weeks ago, it's looking great."

Burnie received minor burns to his leg while battling the flames with his son **Darren** and was lucky to escape with his life. But despite his losses, he's optimistic about the future.

"You can still see where it was burned but it's healed up pretty well, so that good," he said. "We're a lot happier now than we were a few weeks ago, that's for sure. Hopefully we get a bit more rain over the coming weeks to keep the cane going strong." ■



Pictured: Mackay growers Burnie and Lorraine Ward lost sheds, machinery and 61 ha of cane in the November bushfires. But thanks to some good rainfall in December the cane had re-emerged and is thriving once again.

Establishing sugarcane farming systems for **BETTER SOILS AND IMPROVED PRODUCTION**

The long-term monoculture of sugarcane has had detrimental effects on soil health, resulting in declining cane yields.



Modern farming systems including controlled traffic, permanent beds, minimum tillage, legume break crops and crop residue retention have helped to overcome some of the adverse impacts caused by conventional management practices.

However, according to SRA Key Focus Area Leader, **Dr Barry Salter**, soil health remains poor and soil carbon levels are generally low.

Root systems below the top few centimetres of soil are in poor condition, with a prevalence of pathogenic organisms such as nematodes.

To address these issues, new practices that complement the modern farming system need to be explored.

These practices need to deliver an improvement to soil carbon and biological condition while enhancing profitable sugarcane production.

A new SRA project, *Establishing sugarcane farming systems to improve soil health*, assesses a range of practical farming practices that may improve soil condition through the addition and management of organic matter.

Three farming system trials will be conducted in the project to:

- Assess the impact of management practices that include mixed cover cropping and other management strategies such as intercropping, organic matter application and incorporation to improve sugarcane crop performance and soil condition;
- Develop methods of managing intercrops to reduce competition with the developing sugarcane crop;
- Quantify whether mixed species cover cropping is more beneficial than a legume monoculture; and
- Assess the impact of trash management (green cane trash blanketing compared to burnt trash) and tillage treatments (full tillage compared to zero tillage) on soil carbon.

The trial sites are located in the NSW, Central and Wet Tropics regions. It has been a busy time for the research team on the ground, led by SRA's Dr Barry Salter, NSW DPI researcher **Dr Lukas Van Zwieten** and **Mr Rob Sluggett** from Farmacist.

"The purpose of the project is to explore and promote new farming systems that improve soil condition, ultimately resulting in more resilient soils that are better able to withstand stress and often require reduced chemical and other management inputs," Dr Salter said.

"Yield response to fumigation is in order of 42 percent for plant crops and 18 percent in the following ratoon; whereas longer fallow periods have been shown to improve plant crop yields by 20-30 percent.

"This quantifies the effect that soil biological condition has on productivity. Given the magnitude of these responses, it is not unrealistic to assume that yields could be improved through the refinement of farming systems while also maintaining the principles of the Sugar Yield Decline Joint Venture, which are GCTB, reduced tillage, controlled traffic, and breaking the monoculture." ■

Pictured: Intercropping will be one of the farm practices assessed as part of a new project that has just begun at SRA.

Minister continues commitment to growers



Queensland's Environment Minister **Leanne Enoch** was presented with a plaque recognising her ongoing commitment to the sugarcane industry during a meeting with CANEGROWERS Innisfail Chairman **Joe Marano** and Cane Changer project leader **John Pickering** in Brisbane last month.

"Minister Enoch's commitment was a demonstration of the Government's support for growers and recognition of the great changes taking place throughout the industry. It also signals that change is not just for the grower, but that everyone has a role to play in protecting the Great Barrier Reef."

The plaque featured the Cane Changer Commitment Ms Enoch signed in January 2018 when she visited Mr Marano's farm to view firsthand the work that growers have been doing to protect the environment.

Mr Marano said the industry was pleased with the Queensland Government's continued support.

"They've listened to cane growers and recognised the positive changes we're making on our farms, so we've been able to work collaboratively towards better outcomes for all," Mr Marano said.

Cane Changer is a CANEGROWERS initiative based on behavioural science that believes by better understanding growers, recognising them for the changes that have taken place in the past, and telling their story, growers will continue to build a bright future for the industry.

Funded by the Queensland Government's Department of Environment and Science, one of Cane Changer's key aims is to improve the positive recognition of the sugarcane industry by highlighting the ongoing efforts of growers to protect the environment while improving their on-farm productivity.

The project's tagline, 'Setting the Record Straight' encourages growers to participate in industry programs such as Smartcane BMP to demonstrate these efforts and tell their story.

"Growers have been making significant improvements over the years to their farming practices to improve the water quality running out into the Great Barrier Reef," Dr Pickering said.

"It is important for growers across the state to have that support and acknowledgement of the changes they have made."

Currently, more than 260 growers throughout the Wet Tropics have signed up to the project to set the record straight by signing their own Cane Changer Commitments.

The commitments ask growers to detail farming practices they have changed in the past and commit to best management farming practices into the future.

"These commitments help us to tell the grower story and show the wider community the great work that's happening on-farm to protect the environment," Dr Pickering said.

"Minister Enoch's commitment was a demonstration of the Government's support for growers and recognition of the great changes taking place throughout the industry. It also signals that change is not just for the grower, but that everyone has a role to play in protecting the Great Barrier Reef."

Project Cane Changer wants to recognise all growers. To find out more and get involved, you can head to canechanger.com or speak to your local Smartcane BMP facilitator. ■

Pictured: (left and below) CANEGROWERS Innisfail Chairman Joe Marano and Cane Changer project leader Dr John Pickering present Queensland Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Leeanne Enoch, with a framed copy of the Cane Changer Commitment she signed on Mr Marano's farm in 2018.

In her Commitment, the Environment Minister pledged to:

- Acknowledge the ongoing efforts of Queensland's cane growers in improving their on-farm practices, especially as they relate to the health of the Great Barrier Reef;
- Recognise the important role that cane growers play for the State of Queensland; and
- Work collaboratively with the cane industry for a better future, both for the industry and the environment.



Money Matters

with AustSafe Super

ON THE ROAD WITH BEC, FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MANAGER

From a cattle station in Charters Towers, to over 10 years' working in the financial services industry, Bec Assman has brought a wealth of experience to the AustSafe Super Regional Manager team. We caught up with her to see how life on the road has been lately.

WHAT EXPERTISE DO YOU BRING TO AUSTSAFE SUPER?

My background is really diverse which helps me. After growing up on a cattle station, I moved to Mossman and married a former cane farmer. I have a passion for working in Finance and Agribusiness, so I can use the best of my banking, governance and HR skills.

WHAT'S THE MOST REWARDING PART OF YOUR ROLE?

I love getting out and seeing how our regional people are doing – either on farm or in supporting industries. I also enjoy helping people work towards their financial goals and assisting small business by making it easier and streamlined for them to meet their obligations.

WHAT DOES YOUR TYPICAL DAY LOOK LIKE?

Generally, I'm out on the road visiting members and employers, and if I'm lucky enough they will show me around their businesses which is great because I like seeing what matters to them. No two days are never the same and I love it.

FIND OUT MORE

Bec can help employers and members of AustSafe Super in the Far North Queensland region north of Townsville, including the Northern Territory (NT) and can help with any of their super requirements. To organise a chat with Bec, call her on 0408 706 064 or email rassman@austsafe.com.au.

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By Greg Beashel
QSL Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer

Marketing Choice taking shape in Mackay

As we go to print, work is progressing to finalise Marketing Choice for Mackay growers.

The introduction of Marketing Choice in Mackay will mean that in order to use QSL, Mackay growers will need to nominate us as a marketer of their Grower's Economic Interest in Sugar (GEI Sugar).

GEI Sugar is your share of the sugar produced from your cane crop that you have traditionally received payment for, and for Mackay growers includes both their export and domestic sugar tonnages.

Submitting this choice and getting started in the QSL system will involve three key steps:

STEP 1. NOMINATE QSL AS A MARKETER

In order to access QSL products and services once Marketing Choice is in place, Mackay growers will need to formally nominate QSL as a marketer of their GEI Sugar on the form that will be provided.

This form will also capture the percentage of GEI Sugar the grower wishes to allocate to their preferred marketer/s each season, up to three seasons in advance.

STEP 2. SIGN A GROWER PRICING AGREEMENT (GPA) WITH QSL

Once you've nominated QSL as a marketer, we'll be in touch to arrange your QSL Grower Pricing Agreement (GPA).

This is your contract with QSL and outlines your new marketing arrangements with us.

It also helps us set you up in the QSL system so that you can start to deal directly with us for pricing and payment services.

STEP 3. START USING YOUR QSL DIRECT ACCOUNT

Once your GPA has been processed, you'll be issued with your new QSL Direct account.

This is the online account that gives you 24/7 access to QSL and key activities including lodging your QSL pricing and payment preferences, placing or editing pricing orders, monitoring your sugar deliveries, receiving information regarding your QSL payments and accessing a range of reports.

Your local QSL team will make sure you're comfortable with operating your account before you have to use it to finalise your pricing and payment preferences in April each year.

INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Further details regarding the Marketing Choice process for Mackay growers will be released as soon as the arrangements are finalised.

In the interim, you can find more information about QSL Marketing Choice, including our pricing and payment options, through the following resources:

QSL Mackay Office:

Level 2, Mackay Canegrowers Building,
120 Wood Street,
Mackay.
Phone 4967 4618.

Mackay Grower Relationship Officer

Sonia Ball: 0418 978 120
Email: Sonia.Ball@qsl.com.au

Website: www.qsl.com.au.



Common Marketing Choice terms and what they mean

GROWER'S ECONOMIC INTEREST IN SUGAR, ALSO KNOWN AS GEI SUGAR:

The sugar that the grower is paid for. This is traditionally about two-thirds of the sugar that's produced from their cane.

The other third is generally retained by the miller and becomes Miller's Economic Interest in sugar (MEI Sugar).

So the Grower's share is GEI Sugar, and the Miller's share along with any other sugar they produce from their own mill farms is MEI Sugar.

MARKETING:

The act of selling the physical sugar to a buyer, usually a refinery.

It involves negotiating the valuable premiums that are paid above and beyond the base sugar price set on the ICE 11 market, and coordinating shipping arrangements, etc.

Marketing and pricing are intertwined, as the ICE 11 contract used to price the sugar must correlate with the shipping period for the sale of the physical sugar.

PRICING:

The act of securing a base price for sugar, usually by using the ICE 11 raw sugar market.

QSL uses this global commodity market based in the US to price sugar on behalf of our growers and millers for up to three seasons in advance.

OSA (ON-SUPPLY AGREEMENT):

A contract between a miller and a marketer (i.e. Mackay Sugar and QSL) that details how the miller will pass on any GEI Sugar to QSL as instructed by their growers.

Mackay Sugar must have an OSA in place with QSL before its growers can exercise their right to Marketing Choice.

GEI SUGAR MARKETER NOMINATION FORM:

The form Mackay growers will use to nominate QSL as a marketer and allocate a percentage of their GEI Sugar for marketing and pricing services up to three seasons in advance.

GROWER PRICING AGREEMENT:

The contract that a Mackay grower will sign with QSL in order to access our marketing and pricing services.

This will be issued to the growers by QSL after the grower's GEI Sugar Marketer nomination has been processed.

QSL DIRECT:

This is the online portal that Mackay growers will use to lodge their pricing and payment choices each season, conduct self-managed pricing, monitor sugar deliveries and Advance payments, receive payment statements and run reports.

QSL Growers receive access to their QSL Direct account once their QSL GPA is in place.

Disclaimer: This update contains information of a general or summary nature. Information about past performance is not an indication of future performance and nothing contained in this update should be relied upon as a representation as to future matters. In addition, nothing in this update constitutes financial product or investment advice. Growers should seek their own financial advice and read the full Pricing Pool Terms available at www.qsl.com.au before participating in any QSL pricing pool or product.



Caitlin focused on Proserpine growers

Caitlin Davy has joined the QSL Grower Services Team as our dedicated Proserpine representative. To speak with Caitlin, call in to our Proserpine office at 88 Main Street or call her on 0429 084 876.

Australian Canegrower Magazine

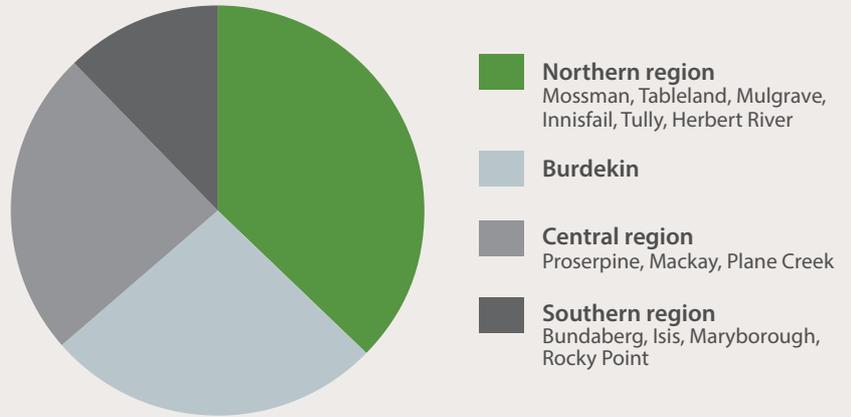
2018 Year in Review

QLD Crop

30.4 million tonnes
Total sugarcane harvested in 2018

31.4 million tonnes
Total sugarcane harvested in 2017

2018 sugarcane harvest by region

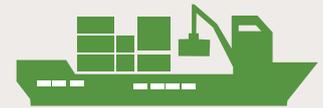


4.2 million tonnes*
Total sugar produced in 2018

4.5 million tonnes
Total sugar produced in 2017

2018 total sugar exported

3.6 million tonnes



109 ships

Mackay
29/5/18

Rocky Point
16/12/18

First district to start harvesting in 2018

Last district to finish harvesting in 2018

NSW Crop

2.0 million tonnes
Total sugarcane harvested in 2018

1.9 million tonnes
Total sugarcane harvested in 2017

0.2 million tonnes*
Total sugar produced in 2018

Sugar price

AUD \$443.18/mt

Sugar price at
1st Jan 2018

AUD \$376.27/mt

Sugar price at
31st Dec 2018

AUD \$447.93/mt

Sugar price high
3rd Jan 2018

AUD \$329.21/mt

Sugar price low
20th Aug 2018

Weather



Drought

Drought conditions were experienced across Queensland in 2018. **Tableland, Burdekin, Maryborough, Isis and Bundaberg** sugarcane regions had been under drought declaration.



Floods

In **late February and early March** damaging floodwaters inundated over half of the sugarcane area between Townsville and Cairns. From **11-15 October** the Maryborough region received more than 180mm of rain, accompanied by damaging wind and hail.



Fire

Bushfires in **late November** devastated growers in the Pioneer Valley and Blue Mountain region who lost property, crops and possessions.



Cyclone

Severe Tropical Cyclone Nora delivered heavy rain to the Cassowary Coast and Hinchinbrook Shire Council regions.

Industry issues



Code of conduct

A review of the Code recommended it be retained. CANEGROWERS argued the Code is an important safety net for growers as it addresses the mill/grower power imbalance within the sugar industry.



Electricity prices

Advocating for an efficient, sustainable and affordable power system that supports irrigated agriculture, CANEGROWERS secured a trial of a load control tariff to collect data to help demonstrate farmers do not impose a cost burden on the network.



Trade and sugar price

An Indian plan to export subsidised sugar gutted the world price in 2018. CANEGROWERS is urging the Australian government to take action in the World Trade Organisation. Australia finalised trade agreements which open up new markets for sugar exports.

Noteworthy industry events



Smartcane BMP

20%

of the sugarcane area are accredited

70%

of the sugarcane area have been benchmarked



Peter Sheedy retired

Herbert River manager Peter Sheedy retired at the end of the 2018 season. As one of the organisation's longest serving and most committed champions, we thank him for this valuable contributions and wish him all the best for the future.

PLANTING INNOVATION SAVES TIME & MONEY, BOOSTS SOIL HEALTH

By Kim Kleidon

Farm practice change can be challenging but it makes a lot of sense when there's a very real and demonstrated benefit.

For Plane Creek grower Doug Pedersen, many of the sustainable farming practices used on his 140-hectare cane farm at Koumala, south of Mackay, were implemented by his father, Jim, almost 20 years ago. Practices like green harvesting, trash blanketing and a 1.8m dual row system.

A much-loved member of the local cane-



growing community, not to mention a former Chairman of CANEGROWERS Mackay and CANEGROWERS Queensland, Jim saw innovation and sustainability as vital to a successful farming operation.

Doug recalls his father juggling the dual roles of industry advocate and farmer for many years.

"He always liked farming. He liked doing meetings too, travelling the world and doing what he did," Doug said. "He liked helping other farmers but at the end of the day he was pretty happy on the tractor or his dozer."

Farming for Jim began when he returned from boarding school to work a paddock with a team of two bullocks. Always open to change, tractors reduced his manual labour and by the time Doug joined his father and grandfather on farm in 1985, aged 19, Jim was introducing spray tanks which are now GPS rate controlled.

When Jim died suddenly in 2007 it was up to Doug to carry on the innovative tradition of his father's farming practices.



Agricultural studies prepared Doug for what lay ahead of him and he credits the knowledge gained in college for his ability to question everything and understand that change should be slow.

"Steady, steady, you can't change things overnight," Doug said.

"When we first started doing dual row we had at least a dozen buses come (to the farm) because it was a whole new thing. We had all different types of wheels and ideas. There were people who came from all over Queensland.

"Some have tried this and gone away from it. I'm not saying it's the only way, there's many practices in farming and you can farm in any direction you like."

A member of the Plane Creek Sustainability Group (PCS), Doug is open to anything that reduces inputs, improves efficiency and enhances productivity.

Like most farmers, he'll try new things and even recycle old ideas if they can be achieved cost effectively and maintain soil moisture.



"It's ever evolving. You're always open to new ideas, you can't ever say that this is the way it's going to be forever."

"It's ever evolving. You're always open to new ideas. You can't ever say that this is the way it's going to be forever," Doug said.

"We'd been doing virtually the same thing up until 2017. Two offsettings, a mounding, a ripping of the mound a trimming of the mound, we plant and that's all we do. It gets sprayed a few times, fertilised and Confidor applied."

OPPORTUNITY FROM ADVERSITY

Change occurred in 2017 after severe flooding from Cyclone Debbie and a failed plant cane crop that was sprayed out and replaced with soybean, something Doug hadn't grown in 15 years.

Thanks to the use of the PCS Group's soybean planter, the fallow crop was successfully grown, sprayed, rolled and a single leg run through the centre of the mound between the beans.

Without further cultivation the cane was planted with the soybean left to rot on the ground.

Continues on page 16 ►



Pictured: (Opposite) Former CANEGROWERS Chairman Jim Pedersen was a great believer in innovation in farming. (Above) Doug Pedersen has developed an innovative planting system that incorporates soybean fallows, minimum tillage and tractor automation.



"Well it's always nice to get more money and the price is tempting, the problem I have is we don't have enough water here. If you were to grow it to go to seed, you're generally going to lose the moisture in your ground. Moisture is more important to me really and we get guaranteed nitrogen from it."

"The result was excellent, it was just amazing to look at the paddock," Doug said.

During the flooding much of the trash blanket had been washed away and rocks were left strewn throughout the paddock.

"The ground was set hard. It was a good thing having the soy on it and after we killed the soy and rolled it down, the ground was just beautiful, you could see it behind the planter and the cane came up well."

Planting the soy directly into the trash has been made possible with the use of a three-row wavy disc machine, previously owned by the local productivity services. When sold off, the equipment became a vital investment for Doug.

But as keen as he is to incorporate soybean for the soil health benefits, he won't be rushing to take the crop to seed for market.

"Well it's always nice to get more money and the price is tempting, the problem I have is we don't have enough water here," Doug said.

"If you were to grow it to go to seed, you're generally going to lose the moisture in your ground. Moisture is more important to me really and we get guaranteed nitrogen from it."

INNOVATION CREATES EFFICIENCIES

It seems other growers are interested in the results from Doug's innovative system, with Plane Creek Productivity Services Limited (PCPSL) running a bus tour to Doug's farm in December.

As well as the unique planting system, visiting farmers were also very keen to check out the automation of Doug's old carting tractor.

Necessity is often the motivator for invention and after slipping on a billet one day, Doug bought the items required to control his tractor and tipper bins via a remote.

"I got sick of getting on and off the tractor to go and start the tipper bin up, my knees didn't like it," said Doug, who often carries out planting operations with the help of his sons Shaun and Blake.

"Now with the remote control system, the tractor is started before you get to



it, you have the tipper bin raised and when you come past it you just flick the cane in, you drive away, lower it and turn it off as you're driving away from your planter - it works really well."

The cost of purchasing and fitting the gear has already been recovered through improved efficiency, markedly reducing planting time.

"We've lifted one to two hectares per day. Two of us used to plant 4-5ha, now we're more like 5-6ha and I think when we really got going, we may have got a 7ha day in one day."

BENEFITS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Changing market conditions and severe weather events as experienced in the region over the past two years, have highlighted the need for constant re-evaluation and also reinforced the value of the sustainable practices Doug and his father implemented over the past 20 years. Doug knows it's never just one thing, it's a whole system.

"I can vaguely remember during drought times, when we used to burn ground and minimum till without trash blanket, big areas used to die out and not come back," he said.

"We've had no rain for the entire crush and we had that failed plant cane where I thought it was going to rain and it didn't - I don't recall that happening before.

"Once the rain came though, even dry areas recovered well. Within three weeks it's all lush green. You can put that down to the controlled traffic, trash blanket and how we look after it because we're into about the third or fourth rotation.

"The precision of being on GPS for eight years (also helps). Prior to GPS we were dual row but at 1.8m your lines can move all over the place."

Doug believes many farms could benefit from doing less to the soil. Minimum till practices may have changed over the years but the resulting benefits remain with a very deep zonal area under the plants, he says.

The soils across the property range from the stickiest black glue pot to sandy loams and everything in-between. This also means a multitude of varieties are planted - 208, 240, 183, 190 (Pachymetra - resistant) 252, and 253.

Still, Doug yearns for a new variety. "We're 'hangry' for a Pachymetra (root rot) resistant cane. Not since 124 (which died with rust) have we seen a new variety that advanced us in leaps and bounds," he said.

"The farm averages around the 80 tonnes to the hectare. This year we're down to 70 tonnes because of the dry but that's pretty good considering we had a cyclone the year before and the flood waters covered everything."

"We usually harvest 8,000 tonne, this year was 7500 thousand. The sugar was up, though, and we averaged 15.1 units of CCS."

In the future, Doug hopes to replicate the soybean paddocks planted this year if they don't have any issues to be addressed in the soil.

"It's been a while since I've played with soil, so I'm interested to see how it goes at harvest especially as didn't put any nitrogen on.

"We used a low pea planter to apply dunder at a low rate, which was a good couple of hundred dollars a hectare cheaper because there was no nitrogen in it. It paid for the bean anyway."

Planting soybean has kept him so busy over the past two years Doug has found little time to enjoy his favourite recreational pastime, fishing and crabbing, which is normally a Christmas ritual. Thankfully, he managed to get the pots in the day after we spoke. ■

Pictured: Doug has installed an automated system that allows him to control his old carting tractor and tipping bin by remote control, making his planting operations more efficient.

THINK SAFETY THIS SEASON

When it comes to workplace safety, cane growers must meet one requirement above all else, says rugby league legend, farmer and workplace safety champion **Shane Webcke**. They must take whatever precautions are necessary to ensure they get home safely to their loved ones at the end of each day.

Workplace safety can be a touchy subject for many farmers and it would appear that cane growers are no different.

"I've been told plenty of times by district offices that if you want a sure-fire way to get members offside, start talking to them about workplace health and safety," CANEGROWERS Environment and Sustainability Manager **Matt Kealley** said.

Matt, who recently took on the new Membership and Innovation portfolio at CANEGROWERS, believes complacency around farm safety often comes down to a 'she'll be right' mentality.

"A lot of farmers think it will never happen to them and even if something were to happen, well it's only themselves they're putting at risk," he said.

It's an attitude that Shane Webcke is all too familiar with and one he knows from personal experience to be untrue.

The former Brisbane, Queensland and Australian league player knows firsthand the trauma and long-term suffering caused by the unexpected loss of a loved one to a preventable workplace accident.

In 1994, Webcke's father was killed while working with an industrial wool press - a preventable death that Webcke has said "ripped a hole in our family."

Now aged 45 and retired from football, Webcke operates a grain and sheep farm with his wife **Allison** and their three children, at Leyburn, south of Toowoomba.

When he's not on-farm, he can often be found giving motivational speeches, presenting the sports news on Channel 7, or advocating for better workplace safety in his role as the Queensland Government's Safety Ambassador - a role he's passionate about.

Webcke says he understands the reservations many farmers have about engaging with workplace health and

safety, but he believes this is because they are misunderstanding the very simple message at its core.

"I am a farmer, so I know what they're talking about," Webcke told *Australian Canegrower* recently.

"I talk to a lot farmers about this, I've had arguments with guys about safety, but I've lived with what happens when someone's killed. Nothing makes you change your ideas quicker than that. The long-term ramifications are horrendous.

"However, I do understand why it gives them the shits. My father was killed 24 years ago, so I've been talking about this for a long time but also I've been listening to people and I've got a very good perspective on safety now."

Webcke believes one of the things that has really impeded the safety message is the "overzealousness around rules and regulation and reporting and all the rest of it".





"But it's important to note also, most of these blokes aren't subject to that anyway," he said. "People who are working for themselves and have no one working for them, they don't have to worry about any of that crap. But I'll tell you what they do have to worry about, it's getting home every day.

"Now I'm not talking about getting a scratch, or this or that. If you're stupid enough to weld or grind without glasses or to use machinery without hearing protection, you know what, that just makes you a dickhead.

"Look, I am the bloke who thinks he's six foot tall and bulletproof, I've always been like that. But do you know what I don't do anymore as a result of losing my dad? I don't do things that can kill me.

"There are people killed in agriculture every bloody day. It's the worst industry, statistically of them all, mining included. Yet we have this cavalier attitude and glaze over about safety.

"I often make the comment when I'm talking about safety - do what you want to do but understand this, if you get it wrong and it goes badly enough wrong what's going to happen?

"I'm not just talking about killing yourself. What about putting yourself in a wheelchair, incapacitate yourself, who looks after your family? Who deals with that? I'll tell you who deals with it, your family does."

Webcke says it is the family members left behind who pay the biggest price when a loved one is killed at work, often as a result of taking unnecessary risks.

"Safety is about not hurting the people you care about.

"My dad was killed in an accident where he did take a risk and he did get killed.

"He knew there was something wrong and yet he still took the view that the worst-case scenario wouldn't happen. Let me tell you what happens then.

"A few years after the accident ... that immediate emotion goes away, then you start to think 'you know what, I've suffered all this pain and hurt and our family, we don't have our dad, my kids don't have their grandfather, and why? Because my father took a risk. He actually chose to do it.'

"And then for the years that go past we have to live with the 'what-ifs'. What if dad had just not done that? What if he'd chosen to do something different? What if he'd not taken the risk? He'd still be here and we wouldn't have suffered.

"Blokes who are chock full of bravado and think safety is all bullshit, they don't think about what their kids and their family might be thinking about them later on down the track if the worst case scenario happens.

"When I think about it, I don't want my family to have to exist under that. I don't want them having to think about that, so I'm doing it for them." ■

Policy Update

Environment with Matt Kealley

Industry with Burn Ashburner

Predictions for 2019

Strong focus on the health of the Great Barrier Reef

Given the drought, the public interest in climate change and the upcoming Federal Election, the focus on the GBR will still create some challenges for our growers. Fortunately, our engagement in Smartcane BMP and reef programs, as reported by Cane to Coast, demonstrates our commitment to action.

Reef Regulations are coming

The Queensland Government will be looking to finalise its latest revision of the reef regulations and push these through parliament in the next three to six months. For growers in the Southern Region, this means regulations will be activated in two years. For other districts, nutrient management plans and practices to manage sediment loss will be added to the current regulations. CANEGROWERS will continue its opposition to reef regulations.

Climate change considerations

According to a report released by the Bureau of Meteorology and CSIRO, Australia has already warmed by 1 degree since records were first kept in 1910 and oceans around Australia seem to be warming. Climate change is being taken more seriously, with the Climate of the Nation report this year showing the number of Australians concerned about it had reached a five-year high.

Federal Election

The Federal Election will be held before May and it is sure to focus on environmental issues including energy, climate change, the Great Barrier Reef and water. CANEGROWERS will be reviewing policies and election asks.

Vegetation management politics

The politics on the vegetation management laws that were introduced in May 2018 will intensify given the bushfires that devastated communities in Queensland late last year. A 2018 Queensland Bushfires Review is being undertaken by the Inspector-General Emergency Management.

The Great Barrier Reef Foundation funding

Applications for a \$20 million first phase closed in December 2018. CANEGROWERS was involved in a new Cane Changer proposal and was part of the QFF Reef Alliance project. Stakeholders will hear about these grants in February 2019.

Sustainable sugar

2020 is the year that many end-users of sugar want to source 100% of their sugar from sustainable sources. This will intensify in 2019 and CANEGROWERS has been working through Smartcane BMP to meet this challenge. ■



Hopes and expectations for 2019

2018 has flashed by and as we start 2019 with the usual hope for the best, it might be useful to summarise some of the issues and expectations for the year.

Adoption

The differing levels of productivity between growers with similar growing conditions remains an issue. A large part of this disparity is considered to be different levels of adoption of best management practice. One way to increase adoption is through extension. Extension is offered by numerous players and is different in each district.

My hope is that with the SRA Adoption Strategy, regional strategies will mature and there will be recognition by both government and industry that the significant investment in adoption can be leveraged if they work together. This will not happen without significant cooperation and effort and CANEGROWERS has a vital role to play in this process.

Transport

Access to the road network for agricultural vehicles is a critical and ongoing issue, particularly as the sugarcane industry operates in regions with increasing urbanisation and population growth. This year will see the introduction of the National Class 1 Agricultural Vehicle Exemption Notice. The permitting system will be taken back by the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator.

My expectation is that this will give growers the same (or slightly improved) access to the road network in a more understandable format and that the permitting system will be improved. This will allow growers to more easily understand and comply with the regulations.

Cane Burning

Burning is still a vital tool for some growers. The current notice which allows burning of cane, tops and trash without an individual permit is under review. There have also been some unfortunate incidents with cane fire in the last few years. My expectation is that there will be an updated notice with conditions which will improve safety.

Bio-futures

Sugarcane is still an efficient producer of biomass and potential feedstock for a multitude of products. Although a longer-term issue, bio-futures is a realistic expectation for additional value-add to sugarcane. The trick is to find something viable which growers can benefit from.

My hope is that clear options become available, along with investors, and the industry can work together to see a more certain future for all. ■





Warren Males

CANEGROWERS Head Economics

The marketing provisions of the Code will only apply if the marketing provisions in the *Queensland Sugar Industry Act 1999* are repealed and then only if sugarcane growers and the mill operator they supply cannot agree to the terms of a cane supply agreement.

CODE OF CONDUCT PROMOTES COMPETITION IN SUGAR MARKETING

That the Sugar Industry Code of Conduct is to remain in place, subject to further review in four years, is good news for the start of the new year.

Established in 2017, the Code of Conduct does several very important things.

1. It requires growers and millers involved in contract negotiations to deal with each other in good faith and without intimidation.
2. It allows growers and millers to reach agreement on whatever terms they choose.
3. It provides for arbitration to deal with any deadlocks in negotiations.
4. It recognises that growers face a price risk and enables growers and millers to determine the pathway to market for their respective shares of the sugar produced should they wish to do so.

The marketing provisions of the Code will only apply if the marketing provisions in the *Queensland Sugar Industry Act 1999* are repealed and then only if sugarcane growers and the mill operator they supply cannot agree to the terms of a cane supply agreement.

While the Code requires negotiations to be conducted in good faith and provides for arbitration as a circuit breaker for deadlocks, it does not put any restrictions on what is discussed or what an agreed outcome should look like.

- It does **not** prescribe or proscribe any outcomes to contract negotiations.
- It does **not** prescribe how the grower or mill economic interest in sugar should be calculated.
- It does **not** prescribe how any disputes should be settled or what the terms of any contract should be.

The Code was a unanimous recommendation of the multi-party Senate Rural and Regional Affairs Committee, chaired by ALP Senator **Glenn Sterle**, in 2015. The Committee recommended a code to address the imbalance in market power between sugarcane growers and sugar mill operators.

In that same year, the federal government's Sugar Industry Code of Conduct Taskforce found that the Code would promote competition in sugar marketing.

During last year's review, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) supported the Code saying that it is an appropriate vehicle to address the imbalance in market power between growers and millers.

The ACCC even suggested that the Code be strengthened so it could seek penalties or issue infringement notices for breaches of the Code.

With the Code's retention, growers can move into 2019 with confidence to choose the sugar marketing and pricing options that best suit their farm business, family circumstances and risk profiles. ■

Membership Engagement and Innovation

It's important that we not only recognise new technology and innovation and the products and services that they create, but that we also have the skills required to integrate them into our organisation's future, says Matt Kealley - CANEGROWERS newly appointed Membership Engagement and Innovation Manager.



The school bell tolled the end of the lunchtime cricket game at Falls Road Primary School. It was coming into summer in the hills of Perth, Western Australia, 1983.

I was in Year 5 and the year was almost over. It had been eventful with the Ash Wednesday bushfires in South Australia, the election of Bob Hawke as Prime Minister and Australia winning the Americas Cup yacht race. But all those significant events weren't as memorable as my first rendezvous with a personal computer in the school library – the Australian-built MicroBee.

With its distinctive bee logo, green screen and two-tone beige casing, it had a whopping 64kB of RAM and a floppy disc drive. The MicroBee was something of a novelty. I thought it was amazing and while you could do some basic word processing, I mostly used it to play games.

My dad, being quite a lover of new technology bought one for home and so began my journey into the world of personal computing. The power that computer had on my thinking was profound. I could play games (of course, what 10-year-old boy wouldn't want to do that), but I could also use basic programming to create pictures and even compose music, which to me was incredible. I wasn't really interested how the computer worked – just what I could do with it.

Sadly, MicroBee computers wound up in 1990 but the advancement of technology used in homes, schools and businesses continued to grow and it is now part of our everyday lives.

In this modern age, where we all seemed to be labelled, I fall into the Generation X category (1965-1982) and the term digital immigrant is sometime used to describe

"Central to the role is better understanding our member's needs, motivations and challenges. What will growers need in 10 years and how do we plan for these needs?"



how my generation moved into the digital age. People born after 1982 (Generation Y and Z) have grown up with computers, the internet and smart phones. Technology is changing all the time, with connectivity through the Internet of Things, machine learning and artificial intelligence now interwoven in our day-to-day activities.

In my mind, this is where I see some of the challenges and opportunities for CANEGROWERS.

It's important that we not only recognised new technology and innovation and the products and services that they create, but that we also have the skills required to integrate these into our organisation's future. Looking ahead 10 years, over 50% of the workforce will be Gen Y and Z. What will they want from CANEGROWERS?

In my new role for Membership Engagement and Innovation, I have been asked to lead our membership engagement strategy, build partnerships and help forge new ideas and innovative ways to support CANEGROWERS vision of a secure and profitable future for cane growers.

Central to the role is better understanding our members' needs motivations and challenges. What will growers need in 10 years and how do we plan for these needs? I think it's about listening and asking questions, having a sense of curiosity, an open mind to new ideas and sometimes challenging the thinking. It's about acknowledging our foundation, respecting legacy, but recognising change will happen and knowing that to go far we must go together.

Like technology, we are building on the information and strategies we already have to improve our membership outcomes and value.

I look forward to sharing this as it develops and getting your ideas and insights. After all, we exist to support your interests. ■

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Mossman	5	0	5
Mareeba AP	1	0	1
Cairns	7	0	7
Mt Sophia	9	0	9
Babinda	0	0	0
Innisfail	14	0	14
Tully	1	0	1
Cardwell	3	0	3
Lucinda	3	0	3
Ingham	2	0	2
Abergowrie	1	0	1
Townsville	2	0	2
Ayr DPI	0	0	0
Proserpine	15	0	15
Mirani	2	0	2
Mackay	1	0	1
Sarina (Plane Ck)	3	0	3
Bundaberg	1	0	1
Childers South	2	0	2
Maryborough	5	0	5
Tewantin	1	0	1
Eumundi	2	0	2
Nambour	12	0	12
Woongoolba	0	0	0
Murwillumbah	2	0	2
Ballina	0	0	0
Woodburn	0	0	0



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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.

home. Motivated Vendors looking to retire.
Ph: Gary Johns 0427 241 250.

HOMEBUSH/OAKENDEN Cane Farm for sale
Mackay region. 100t/ha 5 year average 57 ha property. Fully laser levelled farm with a large bore & underground water mains. Block has 2 deeds 90 acre and 50 acre which can be sold separately. This year's crop, machinery shed with 3 phase power and water, tractor, irrigation winch, some implements and tail water pit pump included in sale. Siding on boundary, great soil, no rocks. Ph: Andrew 0428 597 324.

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; main house fully airconed with pool. Ph: 0400 794 857.

Cane farm Tarakan Road ABERGOWRIE 270 acres freehold Genuine enquiries pls. Ph: 07 4777 4633 or 0408 608 664.

Tropical Paradise Cane Farm/Equestrian Training Property, 96 acres 6kms to PORT DOUGLAS. All farmable land, 70 acres producing quality cane, 25 acres set up for horses. Easy farm to maintain. Ph: Mandy 0408 880 724.



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