

SIX EASY STEPS— RECOGNISING AND MANAGING DIVERSITY!



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The Australian sugar industry is remarkable in many ways! One example is its location in the somewhat diverse environment that extends across a distance of 2000 km!

Is there another world sugar industry that encompasses areas from the super-wet tropics (as found in Far North Queensland) to almost temperate conditions (as experienced in the southern parts of the New South Wales cane-growing districts)?

In between these extremes are the subtropical conditions in Bundaberg/Isis, Maryborough and Rocky Point, and, of course, the moist tropics of the Herbert and Central regions, and the dry tropics of the bountiful Burdekin!

Equally as variable, are the soils found within and across these regions. They range from deep to shallow, acid to alkaline, light sands to heavy clays, high CECs to very low CECs, and relatively

high organic carbon contents to soil with inherently little organic matter!

Some soils are able to 'sorb' phosphorus (P) tightly, others have little ability to hold onto applied P fertiliser! Some of our soils are in well-drained positions. Others get excessively wet because of their low-lying positions in the landscape. A range of soils exist between these extremes.

Additionally, there are some soils that may get 'very wet' when they are 'wet' and 'very dry' when they are 'dry'!

Recognising this diversity and providing guidelines for managing nutrients in this variable environment are integral to the SIX EASY STEPS nutrient management program.

Importantly, the SIX EASY STEPS continues to evolve and improve with time as new information becomes available.

This is made possible by the six logical steps that underpin the program's framework. These STEPS ensure that the system is relevant and useful for all growers (and their advisors) irrespective of their location in the industry!

STEPS 1 and 2 bring together knowledge of the farm/area, the occurrence of different soil types, positions in the landscape and opportunities/challenges for improving nutrient management.

STEPS 3 and 4 are used for interpreting soil test results from accredited laboratories with sets of district-specific

SIX EASY STEPS



SIX EASY STEPS nutrient management guidelines.

Using the SIX EASY STEPS process up to and including STEP 4 ensures that growers are in line with current industry best management practices (BMPs). However, BMP also means that there should be a route for further improvement!

The SIX EASY STEPS program provides this mechanism through STEPS 5 and 6 that promote continuous improvement and cyclical learning opportunities. This is illustrated by the curved arrows in the SIX EASY STEPS diagram.

To enable this to happen, growers are encouraged to use the existing 'tools' in the SIX EASY STEPS TOOLBOX.

These include information sheets, district-specific guidelines, SIX EASY STEPS NutriCalc™, SRA FertFinder, guidelines for developing nutrient management plans (NMPs), etc.

As new information becomes available from R&D projects, further 'tools' such as updated/modified guidelines, information sheets for specific circumstances, electronic apps, decision support 'trees', etc. will be developed and added to the SIX EASY STEPS TOOLBOX.

These will equip growers with additional ways of making informed decisions about on-farm nutrient and soil management, particularly to suit their specific locations, soils and circumstances.

There are several current SRA-funded projects that aim to deliver some of these 'tools'. Look out for them, they may make your job a bit easier! ■

Pictured (left): Bernard Schroeder soil sampling near Mulgrave. Photographer: David Calcino