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Election:
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Cover picture: CANEGROWERS' Matt Kealley and Rocky Point grower Lindsay Mischke explain the process of growing cane and producing sugar to Emily Watts, Luke Craig and Reece Turner from Brisbane's Enoggera State School at Rural Discovery Day.

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Design, subscriptions, advertising and classifieds:
Wayne Griffin

Articles appearing in *Australian Canegrower* do not necessarily represent the policies or views of CANEGROWERS

Published every second Monday by
CANEGROWERS

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AUSTRALIAN CANEGROWER ISSN 157-3039
Volume 38 Number 11
Printed by Printcraft
23 Links Avenue, Eagle Farm QLD 4009

Subscriptions

Yearly subscriptions for 25 issues (postage included)
Within Australia \$160 inc GST
Overseas (AUD) \$250

A membership organisation at our heart

By Dan Galligan, CEO CANEGROWERS

May has been a big month for CANEGROWERS, with the focus squarely on core issues that affect growers.

The Queensland Competition Authority (QCA) has brought down its determination on electricity prices for 2016-17.

The insidious situation that prevails in electricity prices must end eventually but it appears not yet with further cost increases of up to 12.3% to be incurred by irrigators.

This callous decision takes year-on-year electricity price rises to beyond 120% since mid-2007.

The consistent and well-crafted arguments made by CANEGROWERS and other industry bodies have largely fallen on the deaf ears of successive governments, which have struggled to detach themselves from the revenue they receive from state-owned assets.

The cold hard reality of the electricity debate is not the current price challenges. It is the explanations that will be required of government as industries such as ours shift our electricity usage to new and emerging technologies.

While the majority of us will need to fight and continue to battle to drive down the costs of our major traditional sources of power supply, at the same time, we are forced to find alternative sources to disrupt the current market. In the end we need solutions for growers and if policy makers cannot deliver them, all other market solutions must be investigated.

Perhaps of even greater urgency to our future are the negotiations around cane supply agreements, with a pleasing uplift in sugar prices putting an increased level of urgency around the need to resolve this issue for 2017.

CANEGROWERS, as a network, is putting every resource and support behind growers in negotiating effective agreements. Everybody in this industry relies on each other to deliver fair, commercial agreements that can underpin certainty and prosperity.

Both of these issues are merely a snapshot of the broader battle that CANEGROWERS takes up on behalf of growers.

They, with other issues combine to form our membership services to growers. Our newly-formed Policy Council has taken on the challenge of bringing membership

services clearly into their sights with decisions made at their very first meeting in Townsville recently.

The Council decided to form a specific committee of growers to focus on membership value for money. CANEGROWERS has a strong level of grower membership but clearly the Council is not taking that for granted.

By taking a value for money approach it has landed on the very issue that many membership bodies struggle with. That is, demonstrating that membership delivers a value for money offering to growers that must be constantly assessed and justified.

It doesn't stop there. Importantly the Council has also already looked at the policy settings of our membership levels. In response to feedback from some of our largest cane growers, the Council has endorsed a decision to cap the state wide (QCGO) levy at 50,000t of production.

This means that while Districts remain free to set their local membership level, the component of the levy that goes specifically to state wide services will be capped at this production level and any levy paid above 50,000t will be paid back to growers at the end of the season.

There is a deliberate strategy in this policy change. We as an industry want to ensure all services provide value for money to all members regardless of production.

All of our producers, from the smallest to the largest, are important for the strength and unity of the industry.

Hopefully this policy decision will ensure growers at the larger end of the scale are encouraged to become or remain supporters of our efforts and achievements. ■



“The Council has decided to form a specific committee of growers to focus on membership value for money.”



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NEWS IN BRIEF



Rural Discovery Day

More than 150 southern school kids got a little taste of cane country during the 2016 Rural Discovery Day in Brisbane's Showgrounds in May.

Rocky Point father-son growers Kevin and Lindsay Mischke (pictured right) gave the students an insight into how one of their favourite foods is produced. They and four CANEGROWERS staff members talked the grade 2-5 groups through the cane growing and sugar production processes.

The kids were able to get hands-on, planting billets in a mini cane paddock, driving model harvesters and haulouts, handling cane grubs and getting their first taste of cane juice straight from the stick. ■



MEMBERSHIP IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The newly-formed CANEGROWERS Policy Council has membership services clearly in its sights after its first meeting in Townsville.

The Council has formed a committee of growers to focus on demonstrating that membership delivers a value for money offering that must be constantly assessed and justified.

The Council has also endorsed a decision to cap the state (QCGO) levy at 50,000 tonnes of production.

While Districts remain free to set their local membership component as they see fit, the levy that geos specifically to state wide services will be capped.

Any levy paid above 50,000 tonnes will be paid back to growers at the end of the season.

The policy is designed to ensure all growers, regardless of size, are encouraged to become or remain supporters of CANEGROWERS efforts and achievements. ■

FRUSTRATION GROWS

Growers supplying Wilmar Sugar owned mills are urging the company to share a draft Cane Supply Agreement (CSAs) with them prior to the end of the month.

New agreements are needed to provide for grower choice in sugar marketing as set out in the amended *Sugar Industry Act*.

Growers supplying Tully Mill also need a new CSA for the 2017 season and beyond while CANEGROWERS members in the Maryborough district and MSF Sugar have finalised negotiations and been signing new CSAs.

With the Australian dollar price for raw sugar rising, growers are wanting to take advantage of higher prices but those supplying Tully and Wilmar can't because they do not have a CSA in place.

Delays in the negotiations are estimated to be costing the industry millions of dollars in lost revenue.

QSL reports that it is in negotiations with MSF Sugar, Tully Sugar and Wilmar towards On-Supply Agreements which will facilitate the marketing of sugar through QSL where the grower chooses the industry-owned company as a pathway to market rather than the mill offering.

The Bundaberg, Isis and Maryborough district mills have committed all of their export sugar to QSL through to the end of the 2019 season. ■



Townsville gathering for newly-elected grower leaders

CANEGROWERS newly-elected Policy Council and district company directors have met in Townsville.

One of the first tasks of the 21 grower representatives on the Policy Council has been to elect a new State Board.

Mackay grower **Paul Schembri** said he was humbled and privileged to be starting his second term as CANEGROWERS Chairman.

"The past three years have been full of challenges but we are hoping that the next three will give us a more stable and financially rewarding period," Mr Schembri said. "Our right to choice in sugar marketing has been secured and prices have strengthened."

"My belief has always been that with unity we can achieve great things and

I look forward to continuing to work closely with growers and their elected representatives."

Bundaberg grower **Allan Dingle** is Senior Vice Chairman with Plane Creek grower **Kevin Borg** elected Vice Chairman.

Directors from each of the 13 CANEGROWERS district companies joined the Policy Council and Board in Townsville for an induction day which included the launch of the organisation's key Federal Election priority issues (see more on page 6).

"The strength of CANEGROWERS is its proud history of drawing representation and leadership from a democratic and

decentralised process – every member can nominate and every member can vote," CANEGROWERS CEO **Dan Galligan** said of the election process which started in February and ended with the new board taking office on 1 May.■

Pictured: L-R the new State Board is Owen Menkens (Burdekin), Michael Pisano (Herbert River), Allan Dingle (Senior Vice Chairman, Bundaberg), Kevin Borg (Vice Chairman, Plane Creek), Paul Schembri (Chairman, Mackay), Mark Mammino (Isis), Rajinder Singh (Tableland) and Joe Marano (Innisfail).



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Five Federal Election issues to raise with candidates

CANEGROWERS is urging all political parties standing in 'sugar seats' this Federal Election to commit to measures which will secure the future growth and prosperity of this important Queensland industry.

"We are seeking commitments and assurances around five policy areas vital for a profitable future for our farmers and the regional economies and communities our industry supports," CANEGROWERS Chairman Paul Schembri said at a meeting of the Policy Council and district company directors in Townsville.

"Sugar is a valuable export commodity for Australia, the second largest for Queensland, with 80% of our production going offshore. 81,000 people work directly and indirectly in our industry which contributes \$2 billion to the Australian economy each year.

"But there are a number of issues which need to be addressed by the next Australian Government, and all politicians, for Australia to maintain its place in the competitive global sugar market."

Over the remaining weeks of this election campaign, CANEGROWERS members, elected representatives and staff will be explaining these policy priorities to candidates in their local areas and seeking their support for these measures.

The full election priorities document can be found here <http://bit.ly/1Whgq63>

Reduce cost of production

ELECTRICITY & FUEL

CURRENT SITUATION

- Government policy is pushing electricity and fuel costs higher, eroding the international competitiveness of the Australian sugarcane industry.
- Electricity network regulation and pricing is a federal issue. Failure to effectively regulate has caused electricity costs for sugarcane irrigators to **double** over the past seven years.
- The fuel tax credit is critical for maintaining current and future production levels.

1

ACTION NEEDED

- The network component of electricity bills is regulated federally by the Australian Energy Regulator (AER). Network charges are 54% of bills and higher than the cost of supplying irrigators. The cost of redundant and obsolete assets must be removed from network tariffs.
- Retain the fuel tax credit for off-road and agricultural fuel use.
- The National Heavy Vehicle Regulator must provide safe and economic access to public roads for agricultural vehicles and combinations.

Education-based approach to nutrition

SUGAR TAX

CURRENT SITUATION

- A sugar tax risks doing nothing to address obesity or health concerns while severely impacting on grower and industry reputation.
- Sugar consumption in Australia is declining yet waistlines are not. Since 1980, sugar consumption has dropped by 23%, but obesity has tripled.
- Demonising sugar by singling it out for taxation is simplistic and dangerous – a view that is backed by research.

2

ACTION NEEDED

- Continue the valuable work being done by the Australian Government in providing information to Australians about a healthy, balanced diet and good exercise regime. This empowers people to take responsibility for their own health and food choices.
- Rule out a sugar tax to avoid demonising one food item as a basis for public health policy in Australia.

Ensure access to export markets

CURRENT SITUATION

- 80% of Australian sugar is exported. Australian farmers are the only sugarcane producers in the world not operating with subsidies or price supports.
- Too often, sugar has been left out of key trade agreements. We can't sell Australian sugar without fair access to international markets.

3

ACTION NEEDED

- Include sugar in all international trade agreements
- Remove technical barriers to implementing trade agreements.
- Ensure access to Asian markets for Australian sugar is on terms at least equivalent to our competitors.
- Invest, with industry, in resources to specifically address the needs of sugar trade strategies.

Leadership in sustainability

CURRENT SITUATION

- Grower-government partnerships are delivering real outcomes for industry and the environment. The Reef Report Card shows that the sugarcane industry has reduced nitrogen, pesticides and sediment run off. This direct grower approach must be valued and continued.
- The best management practice system for sugarcane growing, Smartcane BMP, drives productivity, profitability and environmental stewardship. Increasing the rate of practice-change adoption requires ongoing support and resources.

4

ACTION NEEDED

- Boost government commitment to reef funding and support growers' continued engagement. This will continue the gains delivered by the sugarcane industry against the Reef 2050 Plan.
- Commit to ongoing support of the successful Smartcane BMP program for 4 years beyond 2017.
- Support investigation of alternative greenhouse management options other than a carbon tax.

Increase R&D funding

CURRENT SITUATION

- The Australian Government's contribution to industry R&D has fallen during the past decade as gross value product has declined. This is impeding competitiveness.
- Australia must be at the forefront of R&D to effectively compete internationally. The use of biotechnology in plant breeding has the potential to offer significant benefits in increased food production while addressing agronomic difficulties.

5

ACTION NEEDED

- Increase total government expenditure on agricultural R&D from 0.5% of gross value production to 1.5% by 2019 to help position Australia as a world leader in agricultural production.
- Ensure farmers have ongoing access to new technologies. Ensure GM licencing is streamlined and rigorous to allow for new technology to be made available quickly and cost effectively.



Burn Ashburner

CANEGROWERS Manager -
Industry

“To say it’s all too hard and the outcome too uncertain to bother and just go with a blanket rate is in no-one’s interest.”

NITROGEN USE

What should growers do as the debate continues?

Experience tells us that the more nitrogen a grower uses, the more tonnes of cane they can expect to produce, up to a point. In economic terms, if a grower applies an additional \$1 worth of nitrogen, they should expect more than a \$1 return in yield.

Of course, there are many variables for each different paddock (and sometimes within the same paddock). Soil type, soil health, nutrient status, drainage, variety, ratoon, weed level and water availability can vary greatly.

Added to this, at the time of applying the nitrogen the coming season’s weather is unknown and extremely variable.

So how does a grower decide what to apply? Obviously it is extremely complex decision and the outcome will always be uncertain.

Six Easy Steps (6ES) is based on many trials where nitrogen is applied at increasing rates and the corresponding yield is measured.

This process produces production curves like those in Figure 1 (below).

The curves represent a plant crop and four subsequent ratoons. It can be seen that each curve has a different optimum yield - shown by the straight downward arrows which is 95% of maximum yield.

The lowest (the blue arrow and curve) is at just

over 80t/ha and 160 kgs of N and the highest optimum yield (the orange curve) at over 130t/ha at 140 kgs of N.

However, the level of N required for optimum yield is remarkably consistent around the 150kg per hectare rate.

This is just an example but the critical point is that these credible trials are repeated many times in different circumstances across regions.

So 6ES is a solid base on which to build for all the variables mentioned above.

Given the complexity of paddock variables, there will be circumstances where the 6ES rate of N is too high and circumstances where it is too low.

This is where research is now being focused and growers will soon be able to benefit from a refinement to 6ES.

From a grower’s perspective, complexity is the very reason for a well thought out Nutrient Management Plan based on 6ES. This would allow growers to make good economic decisions based on the best information available.

To say that it is all too hard and the outcome too uncertain to bother, and just go with a blanket rate plus a bit more as insurance, is in no-one’s interest.

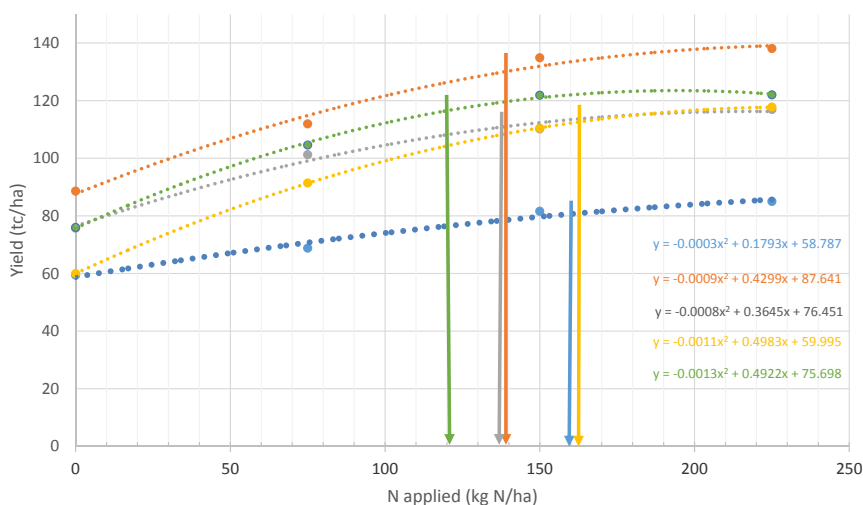
Growers need to take Six Easy Steps seriously for profitability, for their social license to farm and for the health of the Great Barrier Reef.

I urge all growers to at least apply 6ES rates as calculated for each paddock and preferably apply 6ES rates adjusted through a nutrient management plan.

Doing this meets the Smartcane BMP industry standard, which is the minimum expectation from the industry.

If necessary, your local productivity services representative should be able to assist. You may well be surprised at the payback. ■

Figure 1. Macknade - Variety x rates of N



Source :SRDC Projects BSS 232 & BSS 268

SRA to invest almost \$19m

and continue focus on key Impact Areas

Sugar Research Australia (SRA) has announced its research investment agenda for 2016/17, delivering research and development outcomes that provide direct benefits to sugarcane growers and millers.

SRA Chairman Dr Ron Swindells said that SRA would invest \$18.9 million in contestable research activities for 2016/17.

"SRA is making this investment in projects that will deliver real benefits on key issues for our investors," Dr Swindells said.

"In seeking new projects, SRA put the call out for projects that focus on the four Impact Areas of Yellow Canopy Syndrome (YCS), conventional and genetically modified plant breeding, harvesting efficiency, and extension and adoption.

"These four Impact Areas have been identified as requiring priority investment from SRA for the Australian sugarcane industry.

"In addition, we also continue to address the eight Key Focus Areas identified in SRA's strategic plan.

"Our investment includes new projects to commence in the 2016/17 financial year.

"Four Impact Areas - Yellow Canopy Syndrome, conventional and genetically modified plant breeding, harvesting efficiency, and extension and adoption - have been identified as requiring priority investment from SRA."

"These new projects will improve our varieties through introgression techniques and selections based on plant vigour, improve industry productivity through the analysis of industry data, address new chemical approaches for canegrub control and improve identification methods for exotic moth borers and soil-borne pathogens.

"Our investment will also include a new three-year project being developed with the University of New England to develop a remote sensing platform."

Dr Swindells said SRA continues to invest in projects that have a priority on delivering tangible outcomes on-farm and at the mill.

SRA's investment is funded by the statutory levy of 70 cents per tonne of cane, to which growers and millers each contribute 35c per tonne of cane each.

This investment in research is supported by matching funds of about \$6m from the Federal Government and an average of \$4m from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) over the previous four years.

The list of successful new projects is available on the Sugar Research Australia website.



SRA grower survey

The SRA grower survey has taken place over the last few weeks.

One of the key purposes of the survey is to help track important industry trends in relation to research, development and extension.

That information is then used to help deliver better services for SRA investors.

The survey also gathers important information about grower perceptions of SRA performance and assess activities such as SRA's events and communications.

The survey was of a random sample of SRA members and results will be available later this year.

SRA thanks all those who participated and gave their time on the phone to complete the survey.

For more information on the survey please contact **Brad Pfeffer** or **Andrea Evers** at SRA on 3331 3333.

Harvesting survey

SRA is also conducting a survey that is aiming to provide harvesting contractors with information about cane supply quality and losses in real time.

This is part of a project that is looking at a feasibility study for improved harvesting sensors.

Key components of the feasibility study for this project include understanding the current climate around harvesting best management and the use of sensors in routine practice, identifying where sensors would provide most value to harvesting contractors and the greater industry moving forward.

For information on this survey please contact **Eloise Keffe** at SRA on (07) 3331 3351. ■

Market Update

Current as of 30 May 2016

Sugar

WHAT HAPPENED?

Raw sugar futures continue to push forward, with the July16 contract rising over 20% since mid-April.

Sugar has found support across the commodity sector and through the speculative market.

The non-index specs have set another record, resulting in a Net-Long position of 285,000 lots, with talk of it heading towards 300,000-350,000.

The massive long position skews the market to the bearish side (trending down) while the high prices and statistics skew the markets to the bulls (those who think the market will go up).

The question is what the real story is. It seems system (not human) funds are buying on the trend and will continue to buy if sugar prices continue to rise.

The bulls are focused on the future deficit at hand while the bears focus on the fundamentals – in particular the solid crush in Centre South Brazil.

Mills there are working at record rates and with favorable weather the projected sugar production continues to rise, with estimates at 35 million tonnes of sugar or greater.

GOING FORWARD...

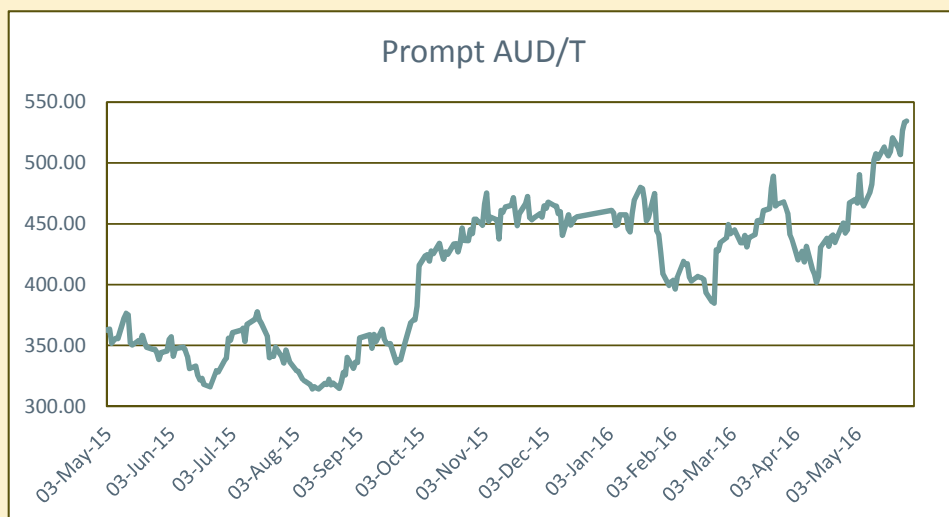
Looking ahead, Centre South Brazil has gotten off to an excellent start but weather patterns will dictate how the harvest progresses, with the possibility of La Nina bringing extremely dry weather to the second half of their harvest and affecting yields.

This week sees Australia start its harvest, and the dry start has everyone positive for a great 2016 season.

In the short-term key indicators point to a bearish market, however long-term indicators disagree.

The result is that sugar looks to be in for a bumpy ride over the coming months.

Contract	Latest Settlement	Monthly Change	High	Low
Jul-2016	17.52	2.19	17.74	15.55
Oct-2016	17.68	2.09	18.02	15.93
Mar-2017	17.95	1.16	17.61	16.45
May-2017	17.55	1.02	17.22	16.20
Jul-2017	17.14	1.02	16.97	15.95
Oct-2017	16.89	1.10	16.95	15.85
Mar-2018	16.85	0.45	16.64	16.19
May-2018	16.51	0.31	16.30	15.99
BRL/USD	3.6115	8.44%	3.6223	3.4418
Ethanol Parity	12.94			



WHAT COULD CHANGE?

Focus will remain on the next UNICA (Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association) and Commitment of Traders reports driving market sentiment.

Perfect weather with a few showers in Brazil will see the harvest continue to power ahead.

What will be the trigger for the non-index funds to start their sell-off?

A strengthening of the US dollar could prompt commodities in general to sell and funds may decide to take some profits.

Another better-than-expected UNICA report is expected and could be the driving force to see the market move lower.



Currency

WHAT HAPPENED?

Market conditions remained heavy for the AUD over the past month.

A rate cut by the RBA and a mixture of results in the commodity complex aided the AUD's fall.

The RBA's minutes reiterated its stance on inflation while also attributing the rate cut to concerns that softer wages renewed weakness in inflation expectations.

RBA Governor Glenn Stevens spoke on the RBA's inflation target framework, stressing the current framework's flexibility and robustness was the best he'd seen in his tenure.

US Federal Reserve Chair Janet Yellen mentioned a rate hike in the coming months would be appropriate, with the US dollar lifting in Friday night trade.

GOING FORWARD

Looking ahead, we remain cautious of strong market drivers out of the US and China over the coming weeks.

With Yellen's latest comments indicating the Fed's probable rate hike in the coming months, markets have priced a 70% chance of a rate hike at the next meeting in June.

Economic data returns to the forefront this week, with key US and Chinese Purchasing Managers Index (PMI) and ISM Manufacturing Index numbers due.

Expectations for a rebound in manufacturing PMI in oil-producing regions will be supported by an uptick in oil prices.

OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries) members are set to maintain current oil production levels at their next meeting, with cuts to supply put on the back burner.

WHAT COULD CHANGE?

The Australian currency's correction over the past month to the 71-cent range has been welcomed and made exporters a little more comfortable.

Locally, we will continue to monitor economic data and RBA speakers for timing over a next potential rate cut.

US Non-Farm Payrolls, due Friday, poses a risk to employment growth following a revision in US GDP last week.

Market watchers don't expect this to be the case, however any impact on a July rate hike would be minimal. ■

	Settlement	Change	High	Low
AUD/USD	0.7182	-4.85%	0.7710	0.7148

Marketing Choice – Keep in the loop

LOOKING FOR THE LATEST INFORMATION ON MARKETING CHOICE?

Head to QSL's website, where you'll find a dedicated 2017 Marketing Choice section featuring a range of resources designed to keep you up to date on our implementation of the new marketing arrangements.

Key features of the site include:

- Weekly updates on QSL's implementation of Marketing Choice and our grower engagement activities around the state
- Fact sheets on key topics, including Pricing and Performance.
- An online 'Registration of Interest' form to receive future Marketing Choice information
- An overview of QSL's 2017-Season products for MSF Sugar growers
- A short online survey to capture your feedback

For details, visit www.qsl.com.au and click on the blue 2017 Marketing Choice image.

**2017
MARKETING
CHOICE**

While all care is taken in the preparation of this report the reliability or accuracy of the information provided in the document is not guaranteed. QSL does not accept any responsibility to any person for the decisions and actions taken by that person with respect to any of the information contained in this report.

SUNNYSIDE UP

Chooks worth their weight in gold, improving soil health and boosting the business bottom line

By Neroli Roocke

This Sunnyside cane farm has taken the name of its location to heart and found a unique diversification option that is not only providing some income but also aims to deliver soil health benefits for the cane.



Greg and Caroline Sandral have around 1,000 free range chickens on a cane farm they bought eight years ago. They produced eggs for markets and restaurants in Mackay.

While both have off farm jobs and the 65 hectare property produces around 3,500-4,000 tonnes of cane a year, they were looking for another income stream.

"We'd toyed with the idea for a few years before getting 500 birds to test the market," Greg explains. The market, it turns out, was more than happy to snap up the pasture-produced eggs.

"We were pretty confident we'd have a market and in the end the marketing side of it happened quite easily so we expanded to just under 1,000 birds and there's still plenty of demand. People really want local, fresh food and they're seeking us out," he says.

The chooks are kept in two groups, confined during the day and kept safe at night by a low electric fence. Roosts and nesting boxes are in covered trailers with solar-powered gates which close off the nesting boxes at sunset to keep the eggs clean.

The chickens and their quarter hectare runs and trailers are moved every week to ten days – a very different livestock task





Pictured: Greg Sandral and son Jonty (above) with some of the chickens on their Mackay district farm. The chickens graze and dust bathe on fallow blocks and roost and lay eggs in mobile shelters.

"We were pretty confident we'd have a market and in the end the marketing side of it happened quite easily so we expanded to just under 1,000 birds and there's still plenty of demand. People really want local, fresh food and they're seeking us out."

to what Greg learned as child growing up on western Queensland cattle and sheep stations.

"The idea is that we will work the chickens through the fallow cane paddocks keeping them at least 100 metres away from a creek area that runs through the farm," he says.

The buffer zone will ensure no runoff from the chicken areas can compromise good water quality in the creek and the downstream Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

Greg believes the chicken rotation will definitely be a positive to the soil quality of the cane paddocks.

"There's organic nitrogen and other nutrients going straight into the soil from the chickens and they do work the soil up a

bit by scratching it around – I'm expecting it will be a big benefit," he says.

The minimal stocking density means grass cover is also kept over the soil.

"The system we use is that we let them pretty intensively hit each bit of ground for a while before we move them on and in the dry months they'll really eat the grass right down but in the wetter months not so much."

In the future Greg will be watching to see the impact of the chicken manure and scratching on the cane crop that follows them.

"It's a good enterprise in that it doesn't take area permanently out of cane and there's not much else that you can do in a relatively small area without interrupting your cane while also hopefully adding a benefit," he says.

Approval had to be gained from the Department of Agriculture before the first chickens were purchased as egg production is classed as an intensive animal husbandry operation, similar to a cattle feed lot.

Other approvals were required from the Mackay Regional Council for a change of land use and from Safe Food Queensland for the handling of a food item.

In the early days, wild dogs occasionally got into the chicken runs. Greg says they seemed to be after eggs laid in the grass rather than birds but he increased the size of the electric fence's energiser and hasn't had a problem since.

The eggs are generally laid in nesting boxes within the trailer and, after being collected and packed, sell for \$6.50 a dozen at a farmer's market.

"The marketing strategy we've had is to not price them as a luxury item but as a quality everyday item and that's worked well for us," Greg says. "We may expand this year: we're just crunching some numbers at the moment." ■



THE GOOD DIRT ON PRODUCTIVITY

Soil health and nutrient management – one of the three core BMP modules

by Mick Quirk - Project Manager, Smartcane BMP

Providing adequate nutrients, especially N, P and K, has long been the focus of soil management for sugarcane growers. However, soil and nutrient management has changed significantly in the past 20 years, greatly improving the efficiency of crop production.

Recommendations for optimal N rates have become more accurate and specific, there is greater attention to ensuring all plant nutrients are in adequate supply, trash retention has reduced erosion, controlled traffic farming and/or reduced tillage have improved soil structure and reduced costs, and well-managed legume fallows have reduced fertiliser costs and improved soil health.

These practices aim to reduce soil constraints to crop production, be they physical like compaction or chemical like sodicity, and therefore greatly improve the effectiveness of applied fertilisers.

This, in turn, can improve the bottom line of the business. It is these practices, and others, that are the subject of the Soil Health and Nutrient Management module of the Smartcane BMP program.

The topics covered in the module include:

- Improving soil health:
 - Managing compaction
 - Trash management
 - Fallow management
 - Preparing land for planting
 - Tillage management in crop
 - Managing salinity, pH and sodicity
- Optimising nutrient management:
 - Soil testing of samples from all fallow blocks
 - Use of the Six Easy Steps to estimate and refine fertiliser requirements
 - Calibration of application equipment
 - Placement and timing of fertiliser application

As with all of the BMP modules, the first step is to benchmark, through self-assessment, your own practices against those considered to be industry standard.

There are only 12 topics, and corresponding sets of practices, in this module. For example, the industry standard for fallow management is:

Soil cover is maintained throughout the wet season either through the use of a trash blanket and sprayed out cane or through the

growth of a fallow crop. No living cane is present during the fallow to help break pest and disease cycles.

You simply indicate if you meet the best practice standard and, if not, what actions you need to take to meet the standard.

There may be variations that reflect the conditions in your district or farm. For example, burning of cane is common in the Burdekin due to the production system, so trash cover is not present and ley crops are their main option for maintaining cover.

Once the self-assessment is completed for this module and for the other two core modules (Irrigation and drainage; Weeds, pests and diseases), and your practices are at industry standard or better, you can seek BMP accreditation.

This requires evidence for each topic in a module to be available for independent assessment.

For the example of fallow management, the evidence required is:

Farm observation of the soil cover and a spray record where appropriate.

In this case, the evidence is a declaration by your local BMP facilitator that he/she has seen your fallow blocks and the type of soil cover (part of the 'farm observations'), plus a spray record where cane regrowth has required chemical control.

Much of the evidence required in each of the BMP modules is provided via the recorded farm observations of the local facilitator. If you have not yet participated in the BMP program, your local facilitator will help you register and take you through a self-assessment and will even enter the

information onto the BMP database.

If you have completed self-assessment in the three core modules, your local facilitator will help you identify gaps in the required records and other documentation.

They will also help with gathering items like maps and will provide easy-to-use templates for any additional records you need to keep over the coming season.

Once you have gathered the evidence, the local facilitator does a check that all is in place (a pre-audit) and the BMP office then organises an independent audit.

This is currently done remotely by desktop analysis but the plan is to move to on-farm auditing during 2016 as this is more efficient and is the standard practice for on-farm accreditation programs.

If you have any questions, call your local Smartcane BMP Facilitator. Details are on the website www.smartcane.com.au ■

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Supplied by Stoller Australia

Over the past six years Stoller Australia has achieved improvements in the soil health of sugarcane crops without applying compost, fungus, humates or any similar products other than micro and trace elements. We strongly recommend them as part of every grower's nutrient package (subject to soil or leaf tests).

"It is all about root growth. Without building good root growth you can't maintain sugarcane yields," said **Martin Shaw**, Stoller's Far North Queensland sales manager.

"Root growth is also the best and easiest way to improve organic and carbon levels and therefore the water and nutrient holding capacity in the soil."

Stoller Australia has developed a liquid fertiliser program that starts at planting and focuses on root growth from day one.

Applied each year to ratoon cane, this program maintains and improves root growth, boosting the vigour of the new plant growth.

ClearStart 15KZ, along with Action 5, are unique to Stoller. Not being made from dissolved granular fertiliser, the nutrients are fully available to the plants from day one, even under dry conditions, and remain available for longer, leaving very little to run off into waterways.

"At our commercial trial site near Mackay we found that after using the Stoller program for five years, not only had yields been maintained longer than on the granular-only half of the trial site, but the soil health had also dramatically improved," Mr Shaw said.

"We dug one metre deep trenches across the rows of Stoller treated sugarcane and compared it with the control half (standard granular program).

"In the Stoller treated half of the field, not only was the root system massively improved, it contained more organic matter and the roots were much deeper. The overall soil health had also improved.

"Soil samples from both the Stoller liquid treated and the granular-only areas were



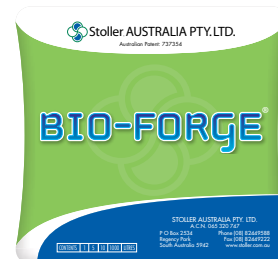
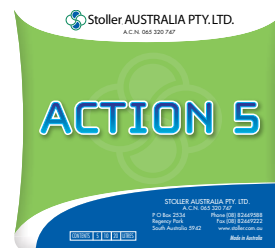
sent to the SRA laboratory in Tully where they tested for pathogenic nematodes that feed on plant roots, and free living nematodes (beneficial FLN).

"Free living nematodes do no harm to plant roots, but are an indication of healthy soil when present in high proportions to plant parasitic nematodes," Mr Shaw said.

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Martin Shaw 0418 808 438
Ian Boyle 0417 853 844

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SSR – STOLLER SUGAR RESEARCH



Using the Stoller Liquid Fertiliser program resulted in larger, deeper root systems.

RESULTS:

Standard granular fertiliser program:

Pathogenic Nematodes - Pratylenchus (RL) 362 / Meloisogyn (RN) 64/sample (Low to Medium hazard),

FLN Beneficials – Bacterivore 426 / Bacterivore 468

Stoller program:

Pathogenic Nematodes - Pratylenchus (RL) 75 Meloisogyn 0/sample (Low hazard).

FLN Beneficials – Bacterivore 602 / Fungivore 486

Soil samples were also taken from below both Stoller treated and granular control cane stools and a full nutrient analysis was conducted.

This showed nutrient availability had significantly improved in the Stoller treated samples, again indicating an improvement in the soil health.

"All this contributes to maintaining higher yields and a longer time between replantings - meaning more profitable cane crops," Mr Shaw said. ■

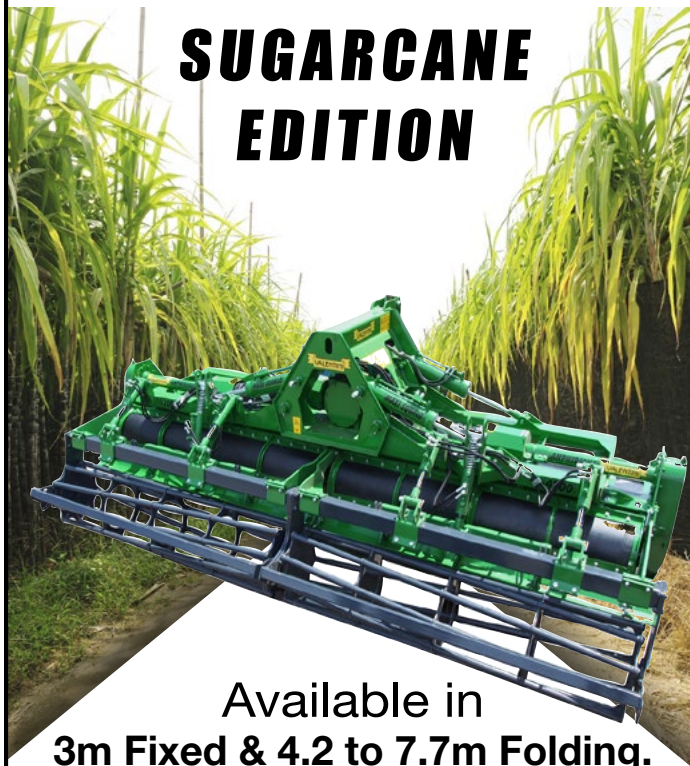


Smaller, shallower root system in the Granular control area

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

CONTACT TERRY EVANS 0438 231362

GRANULAR LIME for optimising calcium supply and pH management

Supplied by Nutrifert Australia

It is extremely challenging to achieve optimal soil calcium supply and maintain a suitable pH for maximum nutrient availability. This is due the use of traditional AgLime products and the methods of application.

Many coastal soils have low Cation Exchange Capacities (CEC) resulting in a poor ability to hold key nutrients in the soil, such as calcium.

Further, with cane's high demand for nitrogen fertiliser for growth, acidification of the soil occurs.

AgLime has traditionally been used as the key input to address low calcium and acidification.

However, due to the product being in the form of a coarse ground powder, there are limitations with its application.

Pictured: Nutrifert Australia's Andrew Olley



Limitations of AgLime

The large particle size of AgLime means it is heavy and falls and holds on the soil surface.

Of course, the finer AgLime is ground, the more reactive it becomes in the soil, neutralising acidity and supplying calcium to the crop.

The downside of fine grinding is that it is hard to keep AgLime in place on the soil until incorporated.

Due to the large particle size, specialist heavy contractor equipment is required to apply AgLime and often it is only applied once prior to planting and, rarely, a second application in ratoon crop two or three.

These large and irregular doses do change the pH and calcium supply, but they fail to keep optimal conditions for the life of a crop that may run over five-plus ratoon cycles.

"Many coastal soils have low Cation Exchange Capacities resulting in a poor ability to hold key nutrients in the soil, such as Calcium."

Benefits of granular lime

Ozcal granular lime provides a new solution for growers. Ozcal is a granular ultra-fine lime of 20 microns in size that is formed into hard granules the size of urea.

"The benefit of granulation is that the extremely small size lime particles can be bound together to make application simple through normal fertiliser application equipment," Nutrifert Australia's Andrew Olley explains.

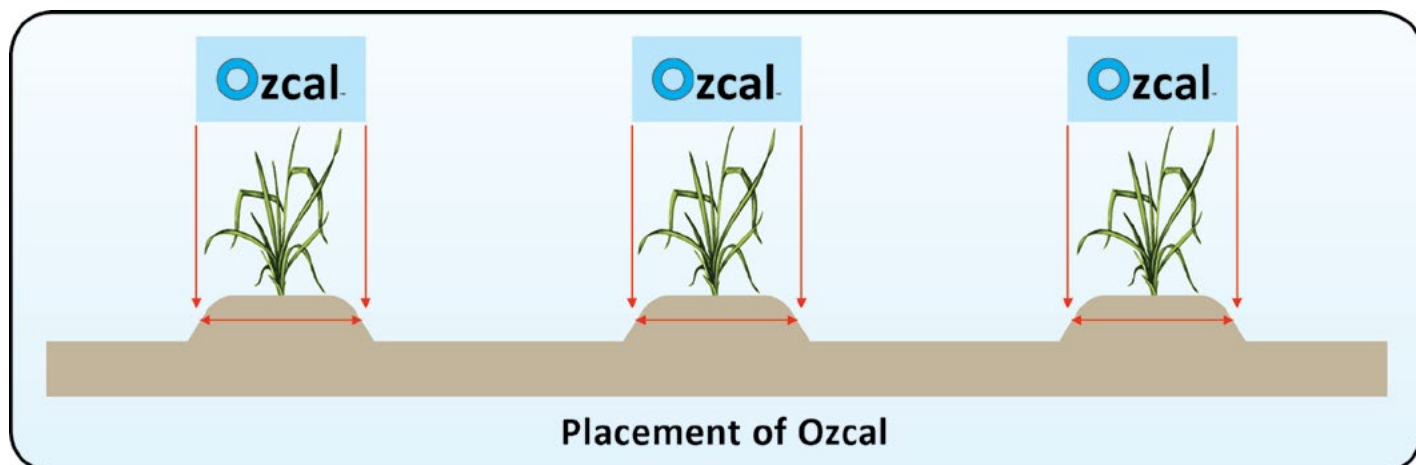
The hard, consistent size of Ozcal granules allows the product to be blended with common plant cane fertilisers such as DAP and ratoon mixes.

"The benefit of this is that fertiliser and Ozcal blends can be applied as one pass by the grower," Mr Olley said.

"Importantly Ozcal is placed in the acidification zone on the stool, where the nitrogen fertiliser is active in causing acidification."

On contact with water in or on the soil, the granules instantly release the ultra-fine lime and calcium supply and pH correction occurs.

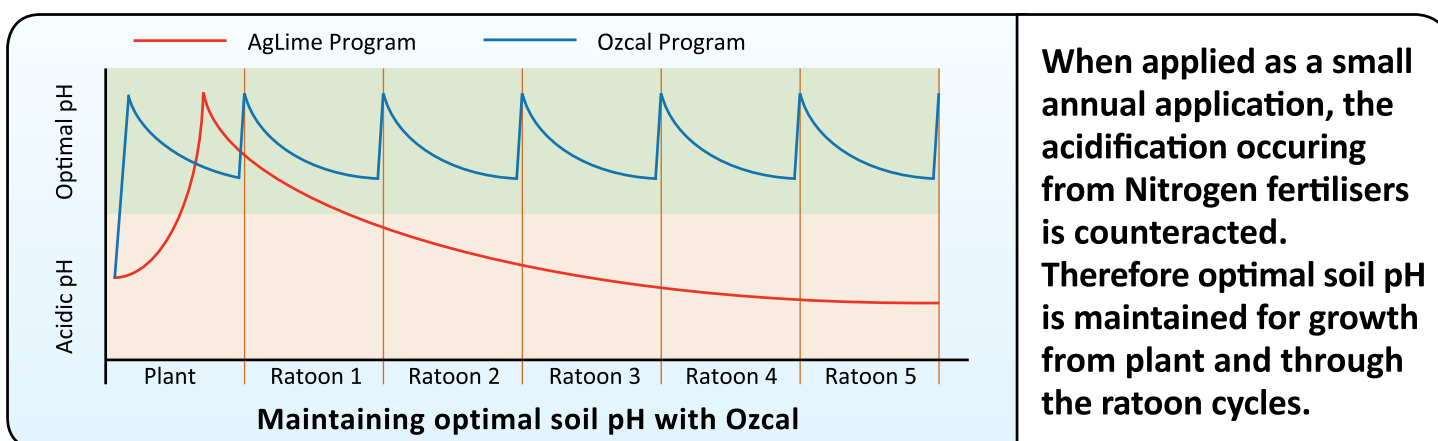
Of great benefit to growers is that the ultra-fine Ozcal is highly reactive and hence rates of only 100-200 kgs /ha per year are required. ■



Granular Lime For Grower Application

pH	Calcium	Granule	Low Rate	Blending
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Ozcal is granular lime that can be applied through grower equipment which means optimal timing and convenience. Due to the granule hardness, application can be with worm or paddle drives, spreaders or droppers.



High Reactivity

Ultra fine particle size results in high reactivity, thereby greatly reducing the rates applied compared to AgLime.

One Shot Application

Ozcal can be blended with NPK fertiliser for a one shot application of nutrient and Lime, if required.

Common rates of application

Plant cane with no preplant Lime 100-200 kgs / ha

Ratoon cane 100-200 kgs / ha



For more information about Ozcal, please contact your local dealer.

Investing in your production system

Supplied by Drain Tech

The concept of underground drainage using pipes and ditches is a technique understood and employed by many farmers.

In fact, pipe drainage has been around since Roman times and vast tracts of land would remain unproductive without it.

Drain Tech director **Richard Gloyne** suggests farmers can become proactive rather than reactive when it comes to treating their water-logging issues.

Typically, wet soil is identified by observation of bogged machinery or poor cane growth, but by this late stage the farmer has already suffered considerable production loss.

An alternative is to use modern technologies to identify and establish soil types that are prone to water-logging.

Armed with a map of areas with a potential for water-logging, the chances of crop losses can be considered in terms of a wet year or a dry year.

Bear in mind that water-logging affects yield in many ways.

Trafficability issues cause time delays in fertilising and weed control, while wet soils don't respond adequately to fertiliser and promote water loving weeds.

Soil structure can be damaged when ploughed or driven over when wet and obviously many tonnes of cane are lost due to poor crop vigour.

Existing soil maps aren't available for all farms but notes from soil testing, topographical maps and machines such as EM38 can build a data base for the future.

Simply marking wet spots as 'way points' on your tractor GPS the instant they are observed can help with corrective measures in the dry season.

Richard suggests that growers view investment in land drainage as a strategy to insure that all input costs are protected, no matter the season, thereby ensuring potential yields are achieved and profits maintained.

"This has to be a better business strategy than planting and hoping," he said.

"After all, the insurance premiums for the farm's assets fall due every year, but peace of mind is better than a big claim." ■



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Burdekin bus trip

While in Townsville for their induction meeting, CANEGROWERS district directors visited two different water management projects in the Burdekin.

Vince and Rita Papale have a 4ha wetland (above right and below) full of wildlife in a low-lying area of their farm. Improved drainage now means higher yields from surrounding blocks as water leaving the farm is naturally filtered.

Willy Lucas (pictured above) is developing an affordable automated irrigation system with NQ Dry Tropics. The aim is to shut off valves before water runs off his blocks without needing to lose sleep.



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Rainfall Report

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Location	Recorded rainfall (mm)			Average rainfall (mm)
	7 days to 9am	Year to date		
	22.05.16	29.05.16		Jan-May
Mossman	233	10	1217	1668
Mareeba AP	42	4	378	702
Cairns	159	2	865	1551
Mt Sophia	229	3	1441	2470
Babinda	366	9	2312	3055
Innisfail	271	11	2014	2525
Tully	284	64	2243	2953
Cardwell	145	32	1432	1608
Lucinda	62	74	1501	1583
Ingham	34	74	1408	1509
Abergowrie	26	5	950	1379
Townsville	0	0	798	847
Ayr DPI	0.4	0	373	686
Proserpine	5	0	931	985
Mirani	3	0.6	911	1060
Mackay	2	0.4	1084	1104
Sarina (Plane Ck)	12	0.4	1226	1225
Bundaberg	0	4	469	560
Childers South	0.8	0	481	472
Maryborough	0.2	0	480	660
Tewantin	2	0	632	1019
Eumundi	3	0	518	995
Nambour	1	0.2	488	996
Woongoolba	0	0	156	745
Murwillumbah	0	0.2	591	938
Ballina	0	2	574	948
Woodburn	0	6	320	765



AustSafe Super



The industry super fund for rural and regional Australia.

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.

Mackay – Proserpine

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. Mason 9550 4-row precision vacuum seed planter GC. 0438 606 578 (Mackay)

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MACKAY AREA - HR truck, forklift licenses, reliable, own transport ready to work. Ph: Dean 0428 865 566 or deanwalker6@bigpond.com

ANY AREA - Seeking haulout or HC truck driver job for 2016 season, have HC, forklift, front end loader, moxy dump truck, white card tickets. Mechanically minded & very reliable, hard worker with good work history, will travel any area for work. Ph Rosco 0418140706 or email bigdaddyrosco@outlook.com

Seeking full-time farmhand work or haulout job for 2016. Have sugarcane farm experience, HR license, forklift license, white card and chemical accreditation. Ph: 0417 682 797 or email jgreco127@yahoo.com.au

Seeking haulout / farm work for 2016 season. I have basic skills but very willing to learn and can pick things up quickly. I am a qualified diesel fitter. I also have my own car /licence and accommodation. Ph Shawn on 0428399344

Seeking work as haulout driver or tractor work. Experience in the mining industry. Grew up on a farm and know how to work the field up. Call 074969 5588 or 0407 572 713 or email rdgs6@hotmail.com

Seeking cane haulout position for 2016 season. Qualified Fitter, have haulout and cane industry experience. Ph: 0437 342 017 or email cg1974@hotmail.com

Property

MACKAY: 1750 Acres, seven lots, Coastal flat freehold property. South of Mackay supplying Mackay Sugar. High rainfall area and endless potential for diversification. House and garage, equipped irrigation system, shed, machinery and equipment. Ph: 0407 157 792

MACKAY: 422 hectares, cattle and cane. Huge supply of water, absolutely drought-proof property, 120 mega-litre water license, right on the coast. Ph: 0407 157 792

HERBERT RIVER: Cane farm 60.73ha with machinery and 4 bedroom dwelling at 194 Lannercost Ext Rd, Ingham Ph. 40454321

WALKERSTON AREA: Cane farm for sale, fully irrigated, 42.5ha cane 3.6ha grazing Ph: 0418 185 663

Wanted to lease canefarm in the Mackay area. Currently farming in the Farleigh area. ph - 0409 897 557

INGHAM: Cane Farm for sale. Hawkins Creek area. Total area 48.3ha. CPA 46.6ha. Shed, electricity & water. Genuine enquiries Ph.0407635175.



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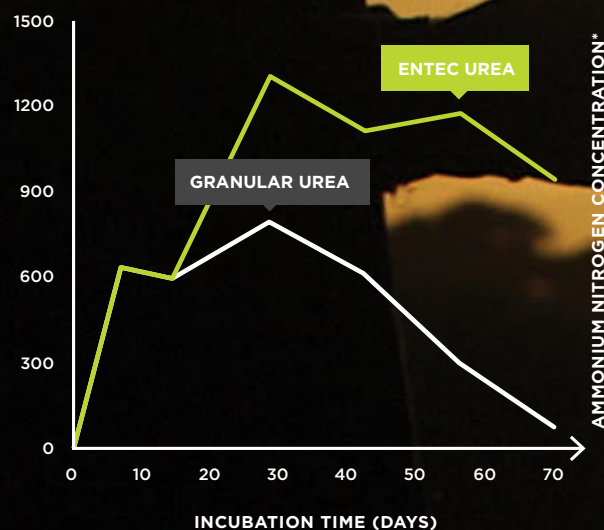
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This experiment was conducted with urea in a moist acidic chromosol (Pin Gin) soil at 25 °C (pHw 4.5) (60% water filled pore space). Source: Suter et al. (2008)
*Unit of Measure is micrograms (µg NH₄⁺ N/g soil)



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