

March workshops to keep northern cane industry moving – Solar on show in Bundaberg

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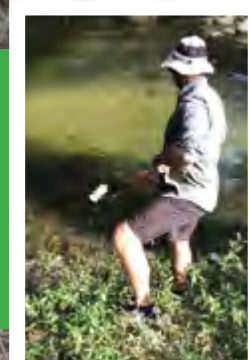
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*COVER IMAGE: Maryborough cane grower Kepler Atkinson says farmers need to be patient when transitioning to a controlled traffic farming system. Read more on page 14.*

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# We were born with two ears and one mouth for a reason

By Dan Galligan, CEO CANEGROWERS

It's a great quote, and one of my personal favourites. Members of the CANEGROWERS Policy Council may even recall me using it during my first presentation to them.

Attributed to the Greek philosopher Epictetus, sometime around 55AD, the full quote reads: "We were born with two ears and one mouth for a reason. So that we can listen twice as much as we speak."

Over recent weeks, I have thought a lot about this concept when considering the role of CANEGROWERS.

We talk a lot about our role as the voice of industry issues, particularly as they relate the views of growers. But at the organisational level our task is first and foremost a process of listening and learning and only then can we advocate.

Whether it is our members' concerns on marketing, electricity prices, transport, or reef policy, if we are not listening then we are not learning, and without this understanding our messages to government and the community are neither relevant nor targeted.

This month marks the beginning of a 12-month countdown to the end of term for our current crop of CANEGROWERS Policy Council members.

This time next year we will enter into our triennial election cycle and there will be an opportunity for change and renewal on the council.

This means that we have entered into a new phase of listening and will be spending more time on medium term strategy and planning around key questions at the heart of the industry and CANEGROWERS' future.

Questions around how to engage better with members to deliver relevant services for tomorrow's problems, such as what is the future for marketing, sugar storage and handling, our place in world trade, and the use of digital technologies in agriculture? As we develop larger heavier machinery, will we be able to move it around our farms? What are we doing to encourage new farmers into the sector and what programs do we need to deploy to better educate our kids about farming?

Within five years will growers only get paid for sugar or will they also get value from fibre or energy, or for carbon sequestration? The questions are almost never ending.

Planning for such medium to long-term questions takes time, and all the while our leadership group is also setting and informing strategic policies on the issues of the day.

With a dedicated group of 21 farm leaders, the CANEGROWERS organisation has a huge capacity to listen and learn directly from growers.

Our eight-member Board is charged with ensuring that your organisation uses its resources efficiently and that we have the capacity and agility to plan for and respond to future issues.

The combination of these two groups gives us key structures to listen, as well as the ability to test and build strategy.

Growers within the CANEGROWERS community will hopefully see their contact with local policy council members as an opportunity to engage, influence, understand and participate in setting the direction of your industry organisation.

We establish these structures to work for our members and only with your contribution can they deliver for your future and the future of your business.



*"Whether it is our members' concerns on marketing, electricity prices, transport, or reef policy, if we are not listening then we are not learning."*



JOHN DEERE

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# NEWS IN BRIEF

## QCA fails farmers on power prices

Queensland agriculture, a powerhouse of the state's economy, has been snubbed in a draft report recommending reductions to regional electricity prices.

"While the Queensland Competition Authority has recommended cuts to the electricity tariffs paid by regional households and small businesses, farmers will feel no relief," CANEGROWERS CEO **Dan Galligan** said.

**"We are extremely disappointed by this snub. CANEGROWERS is calling on the Queensland Government and the QCA to explain why this discrimination has occurred."**

"Irrigators have seen their tariffs rise more than 130% in the past decade leaving many struggling with enormous bills forcing them to make decisions to sacrifice productivity."

The QCA has pointed to decreasing network charges and reduced wholesale energy costs as the basis for its recommendation to cut household and small business tariffs.

"These factors apply just as equally to the electricity being used and paid for under irrigation tariffs by farmers growing food and fibre - yet there the recommendation is for no change," Mr Galligan said.

"We are extremely disappointed by this snub.

"CANEGROWERS is calling on the Queensland Government and the QCA to explain why this discrimination has occurred." ■

## READER SURVEY PRIZE PACK WINNER

We have a winner...

Congratulations to Cairns Region cane grower **Barry Stubbs** who answered the questions in the recent *Australian Canegrower* reader survey and entered the draw for a CANEGROWERS prize pack.

CANEGROWERS would like to thank all of our readers who responded to the survey. Your answers will help guide the editorial content and inform advertising for the rest of the year.

The survey showed that *Australian Canegrower* remains established as the most important source of sugarcane industry news and information for the overwhelming majority of people who responded.

We thank you for your support. If you have ideas or suggestions for articles, you can contact us at [editor@canegrowers.com.au](mailto:editor@canegrowers.com.au) ■



## March workshops to keep northern cane industry moving

A series of CANEGROWERS workshops being conducted through Queensland's northern districts during March aims to keep large farm machinery moving through the complex map of rules and regulations for accessing public roads.

Staff from the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator along with officers from the Queensland Police Service will attend the meetings to explain the regulations, answer questions and hear first-hand how the rules impact on the day to day activities of farmers.

Among the topics to be covered at the workshops will be an explanation of the Guideline for agricultural vehicles up to 3.5 metres in length, the various

gazetted notices which apply in different regions for machinery over 3.5 metres in length and the new permit application system via the NHVR and its online portal.

CANEGROWERS members wishing to attend these free workshops should contact their local district office or see local newsletters for further details. Further workshops will be planned for southern growing regions, such as Bundaberg. ■

### WORKSHOP TIMES

<b>Mackay</b>	Monday 12 March 2pm
<b>Proserpine</b>	Tuesday 13 March 9am
<b>Burdekin</b>	Tuesday 13 March 2.30pm
<b>Ingham</b>	Wednesday 14 March (at harvesting field day)
<b>Tully</b>	Wednesday 14 March 2pm
<b>Innisfail</b>	Thursday 15 March 7.30am
<b>Gordonvale</b>	Thursday 15 March 2pm
<b>Mossman</b>	Friday 16 March 10am





## SOLAR ON SHOW IN BUNDABERG

What role could solar power play in the future of irrigated sugarcane?

That's the question a project in Bundaberg is seeking to answer. Called ***Adapting Renewable Energy Concepts to Irrigated Sugar Cane Production at Bundaberg***, it was officially launched with a field day on one of the participating farms.

The project hopes ultimately to reduce irrigators' dependence on grid-supplied electricity, which has been skyrocketing in cost.

The Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group (BRIG) has led the delivery of the project, which is supported by Bundaberg CANEGROWERS and an investment from the Australian Government, through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA).

ARENA is providing capital investment and project operating expenses over three years while participating farmers, Bundaberg Sugar Services Ltd and Bundaberg CANEGROWERS Ltd are contributing time and knowledge.

Equipment installed includes a 240 panel x 340 watt solar array (81.6 kw), motor and pump designed to operate at varying speeds, VSD Eco drive system with capability to manage both solar energy (DC power) input as the priority energy source with grid supplied (AC power) as a supplementary source.

Being a hybrid irrigation system, it provides a seamless pumping operation that uses solar by day and grid power during the lower cost off-peak night time operation.

The selected pump site is typical of many in the Bundaberg region; it is connected to the SunWater supply scheme which supplies water at pressure to the site.

The new VSD Eco drive power blending system utilises this inflow pressure and manages the motor speed to maintain a constant pressure to the winch irrigator. ■



*Pictured: (top and middle) The Bundaberg Regional Irrigators Group hosted the event which was attended by the the CANEGROWERS Economics and Trade Committee; (bottom) Inspecting the new solar array is the Member for Flynn, Ken O'Down MP, with Bundaberg CANEGROWERS Manager Dale Holliss.*



## GROWERS WELCOME DRENCHING

It's been a soggy couple of weeks across Queensland, with a low pressure system bringing drenching rain to much of the state. But despite some minor flooding and delays to planting, cane growers have welcomed the downpour and the much-needed boost it has given this year's crop.

The Burdekin district copped the biggest falls, with some areas recording up to 200mm in one day.

The deluge saw the Houghton River burst its banks, inundating the town of Giru and surrounding cane fields.

The Invicta Mill also suffered some minor flooding, although no damage was reported.

"We've had a some of the taller cane flattened in a couple of places, but

overall there hasn't been any significant damage," CANEGROWERS Burdekin Manager Wayne Smith said.

*"It will probably put back planting for about a month, but it's actually been a very positive event."*

"The smaller crops and the newly planted cane seems to have coped well.

"It will probably put back planting for about a month, but it's actually been a very positive event.

"It will give the crop a big boost and hopefully increase the tonnage ahead of the harvest in June."

Herbert River also recorded significant rainfall over the two-week period from 26 February.





Rain gauges in the Lucinda area captured more the 500mm over the fortnight, while Ingham recorded 439mm.

"We had some good falls, but they were spread out over the two weeks and the drainage has been good, so there hasn't been any flooding," CANEGROWERS Herbert River Chairman Michael Pisano said.

"It's been fairly wet and soggy around the district, but the rain has definitely been welcome. I haven't heard any complaints." ■

*Pictured page 6: The Invicta Mill suffered minor flooding. (Photo by Sheree Batticciotto). Above: Debris on the Haughton cane railway bridge. The middle spans of the bridge are removed at the end of each crushing season as part of wet season preparations; and flattened cane near Giru.*

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# Policy Update

Environment with Matt Kealley

Industry with Burn Ashburner

## Reef Regulation Regulatory Impact Statement

CANEGROWERS has made a submission to the Queensland Government's Office of the Great Barrier Reef in reply to the Reef Regulations Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS).

In the submission, CANEGROWERS has:

- stated that Smartcane BMP is the best mechanism to address water quality whilst maintaining the productivity and profitability of growers;
- expressed concern that inflexible reef-wide regulation is impractical;
- recommended that greater investment in activities to encourage voluntary practice change would see a better resolution for growers and the reef;
- shown there is limited evidence to support reef-wide regulation, especially regarding the imposition of soil management controls; and
- presented evidence that identifies some data inaccuracies used to inform the RIS.

### Sustainable sugar

Buyers of sugar are increasingly requesting sustainably produced sugar – that is sugar sourced from a producer/marketer who can demonstrate sustainability through a certification system. Most end-users have developed sustainable sourcing policies that require the procurement of sustainably sourced sugar by 2020.

Bonsucro is the major player in the market and CANEGROWERS is working with them to evaluate the alignment of Smartcane BMP and Bonsucro certification systems. However, there are multiple standards that can meet these sustainable sugar needs.

It is logical to have one industry program that meets multiple frameworks for sustainably sourced sugar. It also makes sense to use Smartcane BMP as the on-farm program as it has multiple benefits for growers and can avoid duplication and additional costs

### Smartcane BMP

Smartcane BMP continues to move ahead with accreditation and engagement. The project has now been in operation for four years with the initial funding agreement finishing on 31 December 2017. Funding has been extended for six months with discussions for a further 4 years of funding underway.

Businesses accredited in Smartcane BMP now represents 16% of Queensland's cane-producing area, with a high number of accredited growers in the Wet Tropics region. If you are a benchmarked grower looking to become accredited, contact your local facilitator and join the 256 other cane growing businesses who have already done so. ■



## Farm Input and Research Committee

The *Farm Input and Research* (FI&R) committee, of which I am a member, is one of three committees that report to the CANEGROWERS Policy Council – the other committees being *Economics and Trade* and *Environment and Sustainability*.

The FI&R committee met in Brisbane recently to discuss a number of industry-related issues around research, development and extension. One of the major topics up for discussion was grower adoption of industry best practices (e.g. six easy steps, soil health management and harvesting best practice) and the SRA's adoption strategy in these areas.

CANEGROWERS wants to give its members every opportunity to adopt improved practices, which in turn strengthen the whole value chain and give the sugar industry a competitive edge in the world market. Thus, the FI&R committee is taking a keen interest in the rollout of SRA's adoption strategy.

The committee is also involved in setting R&D priorities through the SRA Strategic Plan and the National Sugar Cane Industry R&D Strategic Plan. Related to this is a Futures Forum to be held in Mackay on 17 April, the day before the ASSCT conference, which the committee will also be attending. One of the objectives of this forum is to clarify an industry vision that will assist in directing researchers.

### GM Cane

SRA has successfully produced genetically modified (GM) sugarcane under strict trial conditions. However, the decision to commercialise this GM cane is fraught with many unknowns – for example, who owns the intellectual property, is it cost effective for growers, will we be able to sell the sugar?

Decisions will need to be made at some stage, and the FI&R committee and CANEGROWERS more generally will be a big part of those deliberations.

### Increasing input efficiency

CANEGROWERS is constantly striving to help growers find efficiencies in their farming operations. To this end, the organisation has been involved in Rural Water Use Efficiency projects over many years and is currently also managing the enhanced efficiency fertiliser project, EE60.

The FI&R committee oversees the implementation of these projects and is constantly on the lookout for further opportunities to help the industry improve efficiency.

Many of these deliberations and strategic activities with long-term outcomes are not necessarily obvious to growers, but members should take some comfort that these issues are being addressed on their behalf. ■





## Economics with Warren Males

## Trade Deals Matter

International trade matters for the sugar industry, for North Queensland more generally, and for the wider Australian economy.

*But why?*

In simple terms, the Australian sugar industry produces much more sugar than we consume in this country. Without exports, who would buy the 3.7 million tonnes that is surplus to our domestic needs?

The same can be said for Australian agriculture more generally – beef, sheep, wool, grains, the list goes on. We produce far more than we consume.

This week, partners to the TPP-11 are set to sign their trade deal. It's a comprehensive deal that will improve trade and market access opportunities for businesses across the Australian economy – farming, manufacturing, service and transport.

The higher exports will boost incomes and help sustain existing jobs and create new job opportunities.

Sugar has benefited with improved trade opportunities flowing from Australia's trade agreements with Korea, Japan, Indonesia and most recently Peru.

TPP-11 adds to these gains with improved access opportunities for Australian sugar to Malaysia, Canada, Mexico and Vietnam.

TPP-11 also improves the Japan-Australia Economic Partnership Agreement by making a significant reduction in the levy Japan charges on Australian high pol sugar. Once implemented, this will be worth around \$20 per tonne for Australian high pol raw sugar.

Other suppliers to Japan are constrained to selling the lower pol and lower value J-spec sugar.

The various trade deals make Australian sugar more attractive

to international buyers, which provides more market opportunities for exporters of Australian sugar. This means better opportunities to capture price premiums and enhanced values for our sugar.

*"Sugar has benefited with improved trade opportunities flowing from Australia's trade agreements with Korea, Japan, Indonesia and most recently Peru.*

*TPP-11 adds to these gains with improved access opportunities for Australian sugar to Malaysia, Canada, Mexico and Vietnam."*

Australia and the EU are about to embark on free trade agreement negotiations, while a new trade relationship between Australia and the UK should also materialise following Brexit.

With protectionism around the world on the rise, trade deals protect and enhance export opportunities for Australian sugar. They also provide a form of insurance by making it difficult for protectionist regimes to close the door on our exports. ■



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Each year, we conduct regional seminars to provide members with an opportunity to talk with us face-to-face and ask questions about their super. This year, we're hosting seminars from March to May. Participants will learn how small changes to their super now, can make a big difference to the future of their super. There will be hints and tips on how to maximise super savings and information on planning for retirement.

All seminars are run at no additional cost to members and light catering is provided. For more information on where we'll be visiting or to register, visit [austsafe.com.au/seminars](http://austsafe.com.au/seminars) or call 1300 131 293. You can also access our tools and resources by visiting [austsafe.com.au](http://austsafe.com.au)

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## Harvesting efficiency

**DOLLARS IN YOUR POCKET, NOT IN THE Paddock**

Sugarcane growers, millers and harvester operators will hear how they can harvest the maximum amount of sugar and cane from the paddock at a series of upcoming regional forums across the Australian industry.



Harvesting efficiency and optimisation is a major focus area of Sugar Research Australia's investment on behalf of the Australian sugarcane industry, and will be the topic of the regional forums being held in 12 locations over the coming weeks leading up to the 2018 harvest.

SRA Adoption Officer for Harvesting, Mr Phil Patane, said improving harvesting efficiency is a complex problem that involves multiple stakeholders and considerations, but is also a major opportunity for the Australian industry to extract more from the value chain.

"SRA has trial results building to show cane and sugar loss as a result of a range of economic drivers across the harvesting, transport, and milling value chain," Mr Patane said.

"In some cases, practice change may come with additional costs, but SRA is working with growers, millers, and harvesting groups across the industry to provide them with precise information to help inform their decisions.

"In order to make practice change, the industry needs detailed information on what losses are occurring and what they stand to gain if they change practice to further optimise the harvest.

"This has been the focus of on-farm demonstration trials in 2017, where we have worked with local harvesting groups, in their own conditions, to define what sugar and cane loss they may be incurring.

"The 2018 forums will report extensively on the results of these demonstration trials.

"The forums will also be an opportunity for harvesting groups to take part in a new round of demonstration trials for the coming harvest.

"This will allow them to assess harvesting efficiency in their own local region, and local conditions.

"The forums will also present information from a range of innovative research activities.

"We will hear about research that is looking at the design and function of harvesters to see if improvements can be made to ensure we are harvesting more sugar.

"We will also hear about a new online tool, called SCHLOT, which provides advice for harvester operators to optimise the harvest."

SRA's work in harvesting efficiency is being driven by a project called *enhancing the sugar industry value chain by addressing mechanical harvest losses through research, technology and adoption*, which is funded by SRA and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources as part of the Rural R&D for Profit program.

To view all SRA events and other industry events visit [www.canecalendar.com.au](http://www.canecalendar.com.au) ■

*Pictured: SRA Adoption Officer for harvesting, Phil Patane, is part of the team working with growers, millers and harvesting groups to optimise the harvest.*





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# QSL pools open for nominations



By QSL Finance Manager – Supplier Relations Bryce Wenham

QSL is now accepting nominations for our 2018-Season Harvest, Actively Managed and Guaranteed Floor pools, as well as the 2019-Season 2-Season Actively Managed Pool.

Nominations for the QSL Target Price Pool and Individual Futures Contract Pool for grower-managed pricing out to and including the 2020 Season are also being accepted. Nominations for QSL's new Early-Start Actively Managed Pool are now closed for the 2018 Season.

This year QSL has moved the Pricing Declaration Date back from the traditional February deadline to **30 April 2018**, giving growers an extra two months to assess their production before finalising their pool nominations.

While this new, later Pricing Declaration Date applies to most growers, those growers supplying Isis Central Sugar Mill, Bundaberg Sugar and Mossman Mill should note that they must finalise their nominations prior to this date and will be notified of their local deadline by their miller.

Growers can change their QSL pool nominations at any time up to their Pricing Declaration Date, including moving unfilled 2018-Season Target Pool pricing to other QSL-managed pools. Unfilled pricing for the 2018-Season Individual Futures Contract can also be moved prior to the Pricing Declaration Date, if no portion of the nominated tonnage has been priced.

## YOUR QSL PRICING OPTIONS

For the 2018 Season, growers using QSL's marketing services can choose either the QSL Harvest Pool or the QSL Harvest Pool in combination with one or more of these alternative QSL pools and pricing products:

- QSL Actively Managed Pool
- QSL Early-Start Actively Managed Pool (now closed)

- QSL Guaranteed Floor Pool
- QSL 2019 2-Season Actively Managed Pool
- QSL Target Price Pool
- QSL Individual Futures Contract Pool

In addition to the pools and products noted above, QSL operates a US Quota Pool.

Participation in this pool is automatic, with a mandatory tonnage allocation of up to 5%. Please read the QSL US Quota Pool Pricing Pool Terms, available at [www.qsl.com.au](http://www.qsl.com.au), for full details.

Participation in the 2018 QSL Harvest Pool is mandatory for production risk purposes and 35% of your pricing allocation will automatically be designated to this pool, as per previous QSL pool arrangements.

The QSL Harvest Pool is also QSL's default pool, meaning that if you do not make a pricing nomination or do not price your full QSL pricing tonnage allocation, any unallocated tonnages will default to the 2018 QSL Harvest Pool.

## QSL-MANAGED POOL OPTIONS

QSL-managed pools aggregate tonnage from one or more participants, with QSL making all pricing decisions for the pool. The choices are:

**The 2018 QSL Harvest Pool:** A QSL-managed pool designed to manage a limited amount of production variation throughout a season. All growers who nominate QSL as their GEI Sugar Marketer must allocate to this pool 35% of their expected GEI Sugar for which QSL is to be the marketer.

Growers are only paid for the final sugar delivered into this pool.

### DISCLAIMER:

*This report contains information of a general or summary nature. While all care is taken in the preparation of this report, the reliability, accuracy or completeness of the information provided in the document is not guaranteed. The update on marketing and pricing activity does not constitute financial product or investment advice. 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.*





If QSL growers make no other pool allocation their GEI Sugar defaults into this pool.

**The 2018 QSL Actively Managed Pool:** A committed-tonnage pool that targets the best return over the season by pricing more frequently as short-term market opportunities arise.

**The 2018 QSL Guaranteed Floor Pool:** A committed-tonnage pool that provides a guaranteed minimum return with the potential for higher returns across the season.

Growers using this option receive an Accelerated Advances program (up to 90% of the value of their completed pricing by the end of crushing).

**The 2019 QSL 2-Season Actively Managed Pool (previously known as the 2-Season Forward Pool):** A committed tonnage pool for the 2019 Season, with pricing undertaken across the 2018 and 2019 seasons.

This pool aims to target the best return, with some pre-set price triggers. It has been designed for growers who seek exposure across multiple seasons.

## GROWER-MANAGED PRICING

QSL's grower-managed pricing products allow you to make your own pricing decisions, either for the current season or for future seasons. The choices are:

**QSL Target Price Pool:** Enables growers to price their Grower's Economic Interest in sugar (GEI Sugar) during the current season and up to three seasons ahead. Features rolling of unfilled orders until 19 April (15 January for MSF Sugar Growers) in the year after crushing commences for the relevant season.

Growers using this option can choose an Accelerated Advances program (up to 90% of the value of their completed pricing by the end of crushing) or the standard QSL Advances program once they have completed their pricing for the season.

**QSL Individual Futures Contract Pool:** Enables growers to price their GEI Sugar incrementally during the current season and up to three seasons ahead, with separate pricing decisions for each individual futures position. Pricing is to be completed by 16 April in the year after crushing commences.

## 2020-SEASON PRICING OPTIONS

Growers keen to price into the 2020 Season with QSL are reminded they can do so if they have QSL marketing arrangements in place for that season.

This includes Bundaberg and Isis growers, as well as those Wilmar, Tully Sugar and MSF Sugar growers who have elected QSL as a GEI Sugar marketer for the 2020 Season.

Unfortunately Mackay Sugar growers cannot access 2020-Season pricing through QSL until their miller has an On-Supply Agreement in place with QSL (Please visit our website at [www.qsl.com.au](http://www.qsl.com.au) for details).

Wilmar growers can nominate QSL as their GEI Sugar marketer for 2020 Season as part of the CSA process within the Wilmar Grower Web, while Tully Sugar and MSF Sugar growers must complete the necessary nomination paperwork with their miller.

All growers should be aware that by making a GEI Sugar marketer nomination or pricing into the 2020 Season, they are in effect signing a CSA for that season, and so should check with their local collective regarding the implications of signing a 2020-Season CSA now.

## PRICING INFORMATION

Growers keen to manage their own pricing with QSL can find an update on the latest ICE 11 prices for the 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 seasons on the QSL Daily Market Snapshot page of the QSL website ([www.qsl.com.au/sugar-prices/market-snapshot](http://www.qsl.com.au/sugar-prices/market-snapshot)).

You can also have these prices delivered to your in-box each day via our Daily QSL Price Update. To subscribe to this free email service or our daily SMS price update, please contact your local QSL representative. ■



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For more information or to book a one-on-one appointment to discuss the options available to your business, contact your local QSL representative Cathy Kelly on 0409 285 074 or email [Cathy.Kelly@qsl.com.au](mailto:Cathy.Kelly@qsl.com.au)

# CONTROLLED TRAFFIC FARMING SYSTEM A GREAT SUCCESS

By Wayne Griffin

When Jeff Atkinson moved his 530-hectare sugarcane, soybean and pineapple farm to a fully controlled traffic system in 2003, he hoped it would help cut costs and improve productivity. 15 years later, Jeff believes it's one of the best on-farm decisions he's ever made and is encouraging other growers to do the same.

It's been 30 years since Jeff Atkinson swapped the cattle hauling business for life on a cane farm. Today, alongside his wife Glenys and sons Kepler and Farren, he cuts around 210 ha of sugarcane per year and harvests up to 300,000 pineapples. He's also Chairman of CANEGROWERS Maryborough.

Over the past three decades Jeff has witnessed significant innovation and practice change in the cane industry, much of which he has embraced on his own farm at St. Helens, 10 minutes north of Maryborough.

By far the most important change, he says, in terms of improving the

economics, efficiency and productivity of his business has been the move to a 2-metre controlled traffic system.

"We've been on controlled traffic and 2m rows for the last 14 or 15 years," Jeff said, when *Australian Canegrower* visited the Atkinson farm recently.

"Absolutely everything we do - planting, spraying, harvesting - everything matches and it's all done on GPS. Even the soybean harvester is on four metres, and the pineapples are on controlled traffic too."

"We've dabbled with other systems - we've done a bit of 2.4m, but the 2m rows work best for us so that's what we'll be sticking with."

While environmental concerns have driven much of the agricultural practice change witnessed in recent years, the motivation behind Jeff's move to controlled traffic was much more practical.







*"Harvesters are 1.9m, so it just makes sense to be on a 2m system. It's not logical to be on a 1.6m rows, with 1.9m gear running up and down destroying the stool."*

"The reason we did it originally was we wanted to match all our row spacings to our equipment, to make the system as efficient as possible," he said.

"Harvesters are 1.93m, so it just makes sense to be on a 2m system. It's not logical to be on a 1.6m rows, with 1.9m gear running up and down destroying the stool."

Controlled traffic is not a new innovation and the multiple benefits associated with such a system are widely accepted by today's farmers.

From the improvements in soil health and yield, to the significant savings that growers can achieve in time and money, there's a lot to be said for adopting a controlled traffic system.

Despite this, many cane growers are still farming without the aid of GPS guidance - something Jeff believes needs to change.



*Pictured: Jeff Atkinson moved his entire cane and pineapple farm to a 2 metre controlled traffic system. The farm is irrigated by three centre pivots using treated effluent water from Maryborough.*

*Continues page 20 ►*





*"We've cut our tractor hours down by a third, so that's a big saving in terms of time, as well as fuel and maintenance costs."*

"All farms are different, so growers need to work out what is best for their own business, but I would definitely encourage them to think about it," Jeff said.

"The benefits are well proven and we've seen them ourselves.

"If you don't compact the soil, your soil health will improve and with that comes a number of other benefits.

"Since we've changed to this system our tonnage has definitely increased. We also do fewer passes in the tractor these days. In fact, we've cut our tractor hours down by a third, so that's a big saving in terms of time, as well as fuel and maintenance costs.

"We find with the 2m row system that sometimes we don't even have to spray

the ratoons, it's closing in quick enough to keep the weeds out. So that's another big saving on chemicals.

"And we don't use a rotary hoe on the cane at all these days, we use a speed tiller. After so many years on controlled traffic the soil works up fine.

"I haven't ripped a wheel track in 10 years," Jeff added.

But, as Kepler explains, there's one key ingredient to successfully transitioning to a controlled traffic farming system - patience!

"It's not an overnight thing, that's what people need to understand," he said.

"Once you've changed your whole system over to controlled traffic, you could still be looking at five years before you start to see any results.





"Really you have to wait until that second crop cycle before you notice improvements.

"The first crop you won't really see any benefits in the crop itself. You'll pick up the time saving benefits and the cost savings on fuel and that, but you won't pick up any benefit in the cane. You need to stick it out to see those benefits."

### Cutting nitrogen

Another big change the Atkinsons have made is the switch to liquid fertiliser. This, Jeff says, has allowed them to significantly reduce nitrogen inputs.

Three years ago Kepler purchased a modified applicator which allows him to incorporate the liquid with other granular inputs and bury them directly into the root zone.

"Our K and phosphorous still go in as a granular but our nitrogen goes in as a liquid rather than normal urea," he said.

"We do it all in one pass - we open the soil with coulters and bury the liquid in with the granular potash. The difference is, if you use normal granular urea, you're more likely to lose some of it to the environment. So to make up for that loss you have to use more of it.

"By using the liquid, and putting it into the ground rather than just on top of the soil, we're able to cut back on our rate because we have minimum loss."

Not only have they maintained their tonnage, averaging around 100 t/ha on one farm and 80-90 t/ha on the second, they've also improved the sugar content of their cane, Kepler said.

"We started at about 320L ha and now we're down to 250L," he said.

"But we haven't lost any tonnes as a result of that cut, in fact, we've probably picked up a bit of sugar.

"The good thing about the liquid is you can store it in tanks on-farm and just fill up as you need it. You're not having to constantly deal with one tonne bags.

"It just makes life easier - there's nothing wrong with that!" ■

*Pictured: Kepler Atkinson with the modified fert applicator. It can carry 2 tonnes of granular inputs and 2000L of liquid fertiliser.*

# FARMERS TEACHING FARMERS



By Matt Kealley, CANEGROWERS  
Environment and Sustainability  
Manager

## Growers gain valuable insight into water quality monitoring projects

There is much debate in the cane industry at present around the issue of water quality. Many growers are unfamiliar with the work being done to accurately monitor the health of our waterways and are wary of the science as a result.

To help growers gain a better understanding of the techniques being used to collect and analyse water quality data, a recent Farmers Teaching Farmers field trip visited a Project 25 collection site at Gordonvale in the Mulgrave River catchment - the heart of the far north Queensland's cane country.



Aquatic Ecosystem and Water Quality  
Scientist Aaron Davis collects water samples  
from a creek flowing into the Mulgrave River.

### How do I know the nitrogen is coming off my farm?

This is a question I hear from growers all the time. And it's a question that Project 25 was designed specifically to address.

The project's goal is to "engage with farmers and demonstrate water quality outcomes to create confidence in on-farm decision-making". And it's doing just that – engaging with farmers.

At the Gordonvale collection site the visiting growers watched as researcher **Aaron Davis** collected a sample from the fast-flowing creek that runs into the Mulgrave River.

From the bank they questioned the sampling process and how the analysis detects Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) and sediment.

They also viewed the automated sample collection trailer, which, through the use of sophisticated monitoring technology, continuously samples the nitrate levels in the water.

Aaron, an aquatic ecosystem and water quality scientist based at James Cook University, explained how the real time monitoring works and was able to show the group some real time data transmitted from the trailer to his smartphone.

The visit proved a real eye-opener for the group, some of whom had travelled from as far as Mossman, Ingham, Mackay and Childers to take part.

Far from being sceptical of the project, these growers concluded that more monitoring stations in the catchments would be a good thing.

They also agreed that more interactions with scientists would help both growers and researchers to learn from each other.

### Wet Tropics Reef programs

The group also visited the farm of CANEGROWERS Innisfail Chairman Joe Marano, where they discussed practices and productivity issues, before moving on to the various reef projects and programs occurring in the Wet Tropics region.

They were given a more detailed insight into the Wet Tropics Sugarcane Industry Partnership (WTSIP), the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project (WTMIP), Smartcane BMP, Project Cane Changer, EEF60, the Reef Alliance Project and the various Reef Trust projects.

These programs, which are funded by the State and Federal governments, are designed to support practice change and improve the quality of water flowing into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.



**Australian Government**

*This article is brought to you by the  
Australian Government Reef Programme*





Pictured: (above) The group visited CANEGROWERS Innisfail Chairman Joe Marano's farm to discuss practices and productivity issues; (right) Growers check out the automated sample collection trailer.



WTMIP Basin Coordinator Sandra Henrich provided an overview of the monitoring program, which included information on DIN remedial efforts such as bioreactors and sediment basins that use flocculants.

Deb Telford, Smartcane BMP facilitator for Innisfail and extension officer for WTSIP, discussed the practices and how the various programs link together.

She also provided an overview of Nutrient Management Plans being created for growers in the Wet Tropics. This was at the request of the committee members outside of the Wet Tropics. Deb provided a working example and explained how it was developed specifically for the grower.

During a tour of his farm, Joe detailed the subsurface drainage work he has undertaken and pointed out erosion issues being caused by feral pigs.

Joe also discussed how he has improved his sandy soils over the years using mill mud, ash and legume crops.

## EEF60

The final stop on the tour visited the enhanced efficiency fertiliser trials being conducted as part of Reef Trust phase IV funding.

Despite being only in its early stages the difference between the control (no

fertiliser) cane and EEF cane is already quite pronounced.

The discussion amongst the visiting growers eventually turned to run-off and how this would be measured, before circling back to the water quality monitoring they'd seen the day before.

Overall the field trip proved a massive success with the general feeling among participating growers best summed up as:

"If there is a problem on my farm, then I want to know about it, so I can fix it."

The group agreed that the work and engagement in programs they had seen during two-day field trip would go a long way towards making this possible. ■



Researcher Aaron Davis demonstrates how to use the automated collection equipment.



The farmers-teaching-farmers field trip visited an EEF60 trial site on Joe Marano's farm.



# Hidden sugarcane disease

## STEALING INDUSTRY PROFITS

The Far North Queensland sugarcane industry is joining together to combat the bacterial disease, ratoon stunting disease (RSD). The disease has been known to growers, millers, and researchers for more than 70 years, but it continues to cost the industry through lost production and requires ongoing vigilance and management.

Sugar Research Australia Adoption Officer, Mr **Gavin Rodman**, based at Meringa station near Gordonvale said: "RSD is something that can be managed by using disease-free planting material, keeping blocks free of volunteer cane from the previous crop and by maintaining good machinery hygiene practices.

"Unfortunately, some of these practices are no longer being followed religiously,

which has led to a dramatic increase in infected cane throughout a large part of the Wet Tropics.

"Some mill areas within the Wet Tropics are reporting positive infections in 30% of blocks tested.

"The cane that is being tested for use as planting material is meant to be the best cane we have. It is scary to think about what sort of numbers we are talking

about when it comes to infection within commercial blocks.

"Specialised methodology and lab analysis is required to diagnose the disease. The days of slicing open a stalk and looking for the disease in the field or under a microscope are gone.

"We know that these methods unacceptably underestimate infection.

"If RSD is present, there is a good chance you are losing significant yield."

Cane productivity services organisations from Tully, Innisfail, Babinda, Mulgrave, Mossman and CANEGROWERS Tableland, MSF Sugar and SRA have teamed up to tackle the issue.

MSF Sugar Mulgrave Field Officer, Mr **Matt Hession**, said RSD was one of the easiest diseases to spread but also one of the hardest to manage.

"Mulgrave growers have been very conscientious about RSD in the past and this is evident in our low infection rate," Mr Hession said.

"However, as milling companies and contractors begin to operate across productivity boundaries attention again needs to focus on farm hygiene. >

*"Volunteer cane, dirty machinery and out of area cane purchases will continue to risk the reintroduction of RSD to disease-free parts of the district."*







### RSD ROADSHOW TIMETABLE

LOCATION	VENUE	DATE	TIME
Mulgrave – MSF Sugar	The Mulgrave Rambler Hall	Monday 12 March	2–4pm
Tablelands – CG & MSF	Walkamin Community Hall	Tuesday 13 March	9–11am
Mossman – MAS	MAS Shed – BBQ Lunch @ 12.30	Tuesday 13 March	12.30–3pm
Tully – TCPS	Tully Mill Rec Hall	Wednesday 14 March	7–10am
Silkwood – IBCPS	Silkwood Gun Club – BBQ Dinner	Wednesday 14 March	2–5pm
Wangan – IBCPS	Wangan Hall – BBQ Lunch	Thursday 15 March	7–10am
Babinda – IBCPS	Babinda RSL Hall – BBQ Dinner	Thursday 15 March	2–5pm

“Volunteer cane, dirty machinery and out of area cane purchases will continue to risk the reintroduction of RSD to disease-free parts of the district.”

Innisfail Babinda Cane Productivity Services Manager and Field Officer, Ms Bianca Spannagle, said RSD had fallen under the radar due to a combination of factors, with the industry on the Cassowary Coast heavily affected by RSD.

“In the great rush of late season finishes, larger agri-farming and the general increased pace of the sugar industry,

some growers and contractors have forgotten the fundamental steps to achieving increased productivity and, therefore, increased profitability for our local industry,” Ms Spannagle said.

Growers and contractors are encouraged to implement stringent on-farm hygiene controls and introduce clean seed onto farms to help minimise the spread of RSD.

A roadshow throughout the Wet Tropics will give growers and industry to further discuss RSD, with events starting from March 12. ■



*Pictured: (pg 20) SRA Adoption Officer Gavin Rodman; CANEGROWERS Tableland Extension Agronomist, Drewe Burgess; Tully Cane Productivity Services Limited Senior Extension Officer, Jordan Villaruz; Mossman Ag Services Extension Officer, Rebecca Stone; Innisfail Babinda Cane Productivity Services Limited Manager, Bianca Spannagle; MSF Sugar Senior Agronomist (Tableland) Graham Cripps; and SRA Leader for Disease Management, Rob Magarey; (top) Using a clean seed source is critical for keeping RSD at bay; (left) A trial showing RSD-infected cane compared to healthy cane.*

*"A road user who suffers damage, loss or injury as a result of water being sprayed on a road may well have a valid claim against the person responsible for the spraying activity."*

# Irrigation Water Spraying Roads—Growers Beware



By Chris Cooper  
CANEGROWERS legal adviser

Growers are reminded that in some circumstances spraying irrigation water onto public roads could give rise to liability and claims for damages and compensation.

In the same way that causing excessive smoke to gather on a road can cause a traffic hazard, spraying water onto a road is also potentially hazardous.

There is a risk that compensation claims for negligence and/or public nuisance could be brought against the grower conducting the spraying.

A road user who suffers damage, loss or injury as a result of water being sprayed on a road may well have a valid claim against the person responsible for the spraying activity.

The facts and circumstances of each case are always of central importance, but there is no doubt there is a risk of liability and responsibility for loss or damage caused by spraying water on a road.

In addition, in some cases spraying water on a road could give rise to a prosecution for a breach of relevant laws and regulations.

The Transport Infrastructure Act (section 33) prohibits a person from interfering with a road. The Traffic Regulations (section 149 and 151) also prohibit a person interfering with a road and in addition prohibits a person from placing on any road anything that may cause an obstruction or danger to any person or traffic.

The Local Authority also has powers to prevent interference with roads within its control. Under the Local Government Act (section 75) a person must not interfere with a road or its operation.

Most local councils (including for example Mackay Regional Council – Local Law No. 4 2(c)) will have a local law prohibiting any activity that creates a nuisance on a road.

## Summary

The spraying of water on a road can potentially give rise to a civil liability for loss damage or injury caused by the water. It can potentially also give rise to a prosecution and fine for a breach of relevant laws and regulations.

It is advisable that growers take all reasonable steps to prevent water being sprayed on roads. Growers should also ensure that they hold adequate public liability insurance cover.

But public liability insurance cover will not automatically cover every circumstance. In some policies, exclusions and exceptions exist for conduct that is in breach of any law. Insurance cover also is unlikely to extend to any fine or penalty imposed for a breach of the law. ■



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## Classifieds

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98 Cameco CHW2500 in very good condition, used for cutting plants and for Backup Machine. 1 set of McLeans 6 roller ¾ tracks with 24" plates, needs repairs. 1 set West Hill 5 roller ½ tracks with 20" plates, needs repairs. Mulgrave Area. Ph. 0407 183 680

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Location	Recorded rainfall (mm)		Average rainfall (mm)	
	7 days to 9am		January–March	
	26.02.18	05.03.18		
Mossman	70	18	623	1371
Mareeba AP	63	41	361	633
Cairns	80	146	1103	1260
Mt Sophia	102	107	1536	1824
Babinda	58	31	1009	2173
Innisfail	98	81	913	1763
Tully	164	57	840	2088
Cardwell	177	124	629	1302
Lucinda	316	228	793	1258
Ingham	121	318	758	1195
Abergowrie	224	132	716	1079
Townsville	161	252	555	747
Ayr DPI	166	170	456	594
Proserpine	89	86	407	787
Mirani	79	66	312	902
Mackay	109	11	281	849
Sarina (Plane Ck)	226	24	471	1028
Bundaberg	163	18	385	431
Childers South	122	6	435	330
Maryborough	227	7	403	494
Tewantin	205	55	484	691
Eumundi	327	66	554	709
Nambour	204	51	355	715
Woongoolba	144	30	346	491
Murwillumbah	106	44	250	641
Ballina	87	21	363	591
Woodburn	68	30	212	491



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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](http://www.bom.gov.au). Weather report provided by the Bureau of Meteorology's Commercial Weather Services Unit.

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Bonel trash incorporator fertiliser box, plastic bins, stainless steel worm, good condition. \$12,000 + gst; HR40 Howard Rotary Hoe 100inch; Marell trash blower; Marell whole stick plant cutter; Town & Country planter. Ph. 0417 617 084

John Deere 6600 Tractor Tyre - Near New - Petlas 480/170 R26 \$1,100 including GST. Ph. 4159 9242

Bonel whole stick harvester with hydraulic topper and trailers. \$2,500 + gst; MASSEY 205 cane harvester \$6,500 + gst. Ph. 4159 3323

Full billet planting outfit: includes Toft 4000 harvester, HBM billet planter and double 3-tonne tractor-hauled tipper bin, 2 bins. \$27,000 + gst, all good condition (farm sold). Ph. 4159 3323

1085 Massey tractor. \$3,500 incl GST. Motor needs attention. Ph 0419 577 110



## Wanted

Wanted: 9 - 12 or 14 Tonne Elevating Bin, in good condition. Prefer CARTA, but would consider others. Ph. 0423 262 715

Hodge Heavy Duty Interrow Disc Cultivator with the wider disc spacings. Ph. 0407 165 661 or 0400 495 418

Cane for Harvest, Gooburrum, Moore Park area. 2018 Season and forward. Reply to amaryllysfarmingco@gmail.com or phone Jay on 0408 598 198

Wanted: 35-1 planetary final drive to suit Toft 6000. Ph. (02) 6646 0207

6t side tipper with or without tractor in good condition to suit contractor work. May consider larger machines. Gin Gin / Wallaville area. Ph. 0410 634 049 or 0427 572 648

Tractor tyres - BUY & SELL. All sizes. Ph. 0418 775 698

## Positions Vacant

Wanted - Experienced Harvester and Haulout operators for the 2018 season and beyond. 80 000 t, 7 day operation. Fulltime or part-time work roster available. Good near new JD machinery. GIN GIN / WALLAVILLE area. Please phone 0410 634 049 or 0427 572 648

Harvesting Contractor for the 2018 crop in the CALEN area, approx. 6500 tonnes. Please phone Jim on 0455 516 969

## Property

Cane Farm Cone Creek Road MT CHRISTIAN. Total area 93.43ha CPA 70.81ha. House, sheds, machinery, irrigator with 2 dams. Genuine offers/enquiries only. Ph. 0428 852 279

Wanted cane farm to lease MIRANI area Ph. 0400 583 247

INGHAM: Cane Farm for sale. Hawkins Creek. Total Area 48.3ha. CPA 46.6ha. Shed, electricity & water. Genuine enquiries Ph. 0407 635 175

CANE FARM FOR SALE \$750,000. 507 Eton-Homebush Rd, OAKENDEN (Mackay Region, Central Qld). 6brm home and sheds. 65.58ha (162 acres), 2 freehold titles, WIWO. Irrigated, close cart, flat, no rocks, good soil, 25 mins to town. Ph Pauline 0428 575 787 or Kent 0427 877 874

Cane farm Tarakan Road ABERGOWRIE 270 acres freehold Genuine enquiries pls phone 4777 4633 or 0408 608 664

Tropical Paradise Cane Farm/Equestrian Training Property, 96 acres 6klms to PORT DOUGLAS, with amazing views to the Coral Sea/Daintree and Port Douglas. All farm able land, 70 acres producing quality cane, 25 acres set up for Horses, agistment, training and tourist rides. 10 paddocks dressage arena, round yard, jumping arena and more. 3 bedroom high set renovated queenslander, cane cottage and sheds. Great income from both Cane and Horses. Horse business has huge potential to expand as a tourist business and has a great reputation already. More Pics [www.horsedeals.com.au/listings/tropical-horse-paradise-b46ffd33-0236-427b-9f3e-ddaad136bb28](http://www.horsedeals.com.au/listings/tropical-horse-paradise-b46ffd33-0236-427b-9f3e-ddaad136bb28). \$1.95 M ONO. Easy farm to maintain in one of the pretty places in far north Qld. Call 0408 880 724 Mandy

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