What is the industry doing to ensure innovation, sustainability and profitability?

Time to step up

Case IH Step UP! 2013 signals a bright future for our young farmers

How research is changing farming
The cane farmers’ voice providing:

- Next Gen program
- Government and industry representation
- Local branches
- Collective bargaining
- General farm insurance
- Crop insurance
- Financial planning
- Pays service
- Media services
- Issue briefs
- Conferences
- Networking opportunities

www.acfa.com.au
Letter from the Editor

Welcome to Next Gen Farmer – the new magazine by farmers, for farmers.

The cane farming industry has a Next Gen challenge: how to ensure the next generation of young, innovative, intelligent farmers have a voice in the industry’s future.

Why is this challenge so important to tackle head on? Because, we’ve got a problem. Most of our cane farmers aren’t young and we’re in danger of losing vital knowledge. We need to have a younger generation that’s informed and able to create new opportunities for their individual farms and for the Australian sugar industry as a whole.

To have a stronger voice, you need to be well informed of the contemporary issues in your industry. You also need to have a good view of what everyone else is up to. That’s part of what Next Gen Farmer has to offer. The magazine’s contributors share with you new thinking in farming, stories of fellow farmers success and provide inspiration for your sustainability.

Innovation, profitability and sustainability are the key issues that are facing the cane farming industry at present. The Case IH Step UP! conference on the Gold Coast is set up around those themes and we’ve explored them in this first issue of Next Gen Farmer too.

From northern New South Wales to Far North Queensland, and as far as Fiji, Singapore, Brazil, London and Indonesia, cane farmers are coming to meet on the Gold Coast for the Case IH Step UP! conference. There’ll be discussions about cutting-edge technologies, innovations in research, market trends, environmental sustainability – and, no doubt, recovery in the wake of unforeseen circumstances such as the recent devastating floods.

These discussions need the experience and knowledge of the older farmer, and the new thinking and energy of the younger farmer, to develop the kind of action plan for the future that the sugar industry deserves.

But the conference is also about the important business of you and your family enjoying yourselves, meeting new people and catching up with mates you don’t get to see much. Take the time to create a network of people from home and overseas that you can call on for a chat or advice, and make the most of the opportunities you get to just chew the fat and enjoy a beer.

I hope you enjoy this first issue of Next Gen Farmer and it inspires you to step up to the Next Gen challenge.

Fiona Forrest
Editor, Next Gen Farmer

The Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA) produces Next Gen Farmer. Views expressed within are not necessarily those of the ACFA.

Foreword

Hello and welcome to our new Next Gen Farmer magazine, which we are launching at our Case IH Step UP! conference.

We hope you enjoy reading the magazine that we have created with you, the farmer, in mind.

In these pages, you will find informative stories about innovative farming practices that we hope will inspire you throughout the Case IH Step UP! conference and beyond.

The Next Gen Farmer magazine will be a quarterly publication that will also be available to download via the Next Gen Farmer magazine App for your smartphone.

We hope that by embracing new technology, we will be encouraging farmers, both established and new, to use the Next Gen Farmer magazine as a resource.

Farmers in our industry are at the cutting edge of innovation and technological advances, and we believe this magazine reflects this.

The magazine also has quite a lot of information about the Case IH Step UP! conference, with articles about our guest speakers such as Wallaby Captain and business leader, John Eales.

A big thanks to our major sponsors for the conference, especially Case IH, SRDC and QSL, without whom this conference and new launch magazine would not be possible.

So sit back, grab a cuppa (or a rum) and flick through the pages of our new magazine.

Cheers

Chairman
Australian Cane Farmers Association and Next Gen
Beef, cotton, sheep and dairy may claim to be the biggest and best with their size and scale but it’s the resilience and romance of sugar that has captivated the hearts and minds of Australian communities. That’s especially true for those along the 2100 kilometres of coastline where the crop has been grown for more than 100 years.

Innisfail, Ingham, Sarina, Harwood and Mossman are just a few of the coastal towns that have been celebrating their connection to the industry for generations. They rely on sugar and are proud their identity is intertwined with the industry.

Now, with sugar under attack on several fronts – from urban development taking cane land, to stricter environmental controls to overseas buy-ups – it’s time for the next generation of growers to take their place and lead the way to a better future. Many would say they are built on sugar.

The Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA) has acknowledged the need to nurture the next generation, underwriting the Case iH Step Up! conference. The conference will get everyone in one room to talk about the issues and opportunities, while firmly focused on better times ahead. ACFA knows no progressive industry can address problems without engaging and empowering its younger members. They are the future.

Case iH Step Up! is a chance to network, up-skill, learn and unite for what is sure to be an exciting future. Australian consumers depend on sugar, along with our trading partners with 80 per cent of the crop exported annually. So the Case iH Step Up! conference is perfectly timed to get the industry talking and delegates thinking about the challenges in 2013 and beyond, even before the first stalk of cane is cut and milled in June.

But what do you do if you’re a young gun trying to find your place in the industry? How do you find your way and contribute
“I want them to take ownership. At the end of the conference I want them to be proud of the industry because they should be proud of the industry. I don’t want them just to be price takers like other farming industries.”

Gerard Puglisi is a great example of the opportunities that exist in sugar and how to be involved. He works in the family’s sugar cane business in north Queensland and in recent years has also been developing a cocoa plantation.

He’s also worked in several roles within sugar and is now the Next Gen Officer as well as being on the ACFA board. For him, the conference is about discussing the issues confronting young growers and he wants them to turn up and get switched on.

He reaps off several important challenges for the next crop of farmers and being active in decision-making is among the first.

“Younger farmers aren’t having as much of a say as they should or could be. Important decisions are being made in the industry about their future and the future of the industry,” he says.

“I’m a director of ACFA and there are just a few emerging growers that are getting involved and lots wanting to be more involved. That’s what we want to see, more of our younger guys and those that are just starting to make the decision on the farm, to get involved and have a say, as well as get some experience and build some networks. All while being more involved in what’s happening with the industry at that higher level.”

This is a challenge that all farming sectors have grappled with in recent years and those that have engaged their younger members have been the better for it.

Finance is another concern, Gerard continues, but growers starting out don’t have to overcome that obstacle on their own. Support is available and it always helps to talk to others.

“Finance is definitely an issue,” he says. “Some lenders are reluctant to back young farmers into a farm or give them money for a tractor or a ute or machinery. We’re able to help and get them talking to some lenders that understand farming and that helps out once they understand a farmer’s goals.”

These issues are some of the many to be touched on at the Case IH Step Up! conference, while beyond the event the contacts growers make to expand their network will become invaluable in overcoming future hurdles.

Gerard is urging milling companies and growers to be more open and pro-active with their communication and the conference is a great kick-starter for that. Better use of technology will be key in several discussions as it has also been identified as critical for better returns.

“We need to be harnessing technology as best we can. The future for farmers is working smarter, not harder,” Gerard says. “We have a lot of technology that helps make it easier to farm. For instance GPS and controlled traffic are just two areas that can really help us on a farm.

“We are doing a lot of things better than we have in the past including hooded spray gear and better application of fertiliser and we have become a lot more open to change and learning better ways of doing things.”

Next Gen and the Case IH Step Up! conference is about emerging farmers taking the baton held by their aging counterparts and making the industry sustainable. Something Gerard says they have well within their grasp after his long road trip meeting farmers, offering support and asking what the organisation can do for them.

“The industry does have issues and opportunities and the message we are sending to younger growers is that we want to have them involved.”

And being involved is worth the effort as shown by farming innovator Robert Quirk. The Tweed Valley veteran and ACFA board member was the first farmer in Australia to achieve Bonsucro accreditation, an international sustainability measure backed by some of the world’s biggest manufacturers using sugar. The Quirk family is well known and well

“Younger farmers aren’t having as much of a say as they should”

“What’s really motivating me to push this Case IH Step UP! conference is to give the young growers the opportunity to take ownership of the industry and be more commercially focused and more savvy with how they run their farms and manage their crops,” he says.
respected in the industry and Robert is always available to champion sugar cane and farming in general. He also shares knowledge with fellow growers, particularly about acid sulphate soils, and spends many hours each month educating the public and other stakeholders.

“It’s important to have fellow growers to call on and talk to when issues arise”

He’s in no doubt that the time is right for younger growers to come forward and he wants them to be more involved, by being more active off the farm and joining a board or grower group, or just strengthening their networks among fellow growers and trying to farm as best they can.

“The short term is going to be a bit tough but sugar cane is one of the best crops in the world and I believe there is a great future in the industry for younger growers,” he says.

Reflecting on the changes he has seen in the industry he says manual labour required on the farm is a lot less now than it was in 1959 when he entered the industry. Still, he’s not planning on quitting anytime soon after 53 years of the highs and lows and industry. still, he’s not planning on quitting anytime soon after 53 years of the highs and lows and continues to enjoy life on the farm by the Tweed River, just a short drive south of Coolangatta airport.

“I hope I’ve got 10 years left and I hope it doesn’t go as fast as those first 53,” he laughs. “I’d like to be young and getting into the industry now and see what opportunities there are for everyone in three years time because I reckon it’s a really exciting time.”

Top of his list of issues for the younger growers to address, Robert says, is raising capital to enter the industry. He’s in no doubt that the time is right for younger growers to be positive and take a stand to help them carve out a brighter future for themselves, their mates and the Australian industry.

First and foremost he stresses again it’s time for younger growers to be involved with sugar, “you can almost be ashamed to be involved with sugar,” he says. “Young growers should be proud of the industry.”

How the industry is harvesting the Next Gen of Australia’s Cane Farmers

The Next Gen program aims to encourage knowledge sharing between farmers and industry stakeholders

The Next Generation program (Next Gen) has been developed in response to a major issue the sugar cane industry is facing regarding its main asset – its farmers. The industry has identified a need to entice young farmers into a career in agriculture, specifically in the sugar cane industry. It is also important to ensure the more established farmer is encouraged to transfer the wealth of their knowledge to the incoming generation.

Next Gen is a unique and inclusive program aimed at creating a useful and meaningful network for farmers. The future of the cane industry lays with the successful induction of younger farmers into our farming businesses, preparing them to eventually take over the reins.

Next Gen is currently inviting applications from young cane farmers in each key region so that they can be the local Next Gen Rep. This is because the cane regions of Australia are so vast, so the Next Gen Officer needs ‘on-the-ground’ assistance to ensure the program is delivered properly.

The Next Gen Reps will eventually form the Next Gen Board and successful applicants will receive leadership, media and management training.

The Next Gen program has already received applications from some young farmers. The successful applicants will be announced at the Case IH Step UP! conference Gala Dinner, hosted by Sam Kekovich. They will receive a grant from Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) of up to $1,500 towards their Case IH Step UP! 2013 conference costs.

Application forms for the remaining Next Gen Rep seats are available at the ACFA trade stall at the Case IH Step UP! Conference, and also online at www.nextgenfarmer.com. Forms can be submitted to admin@acfa.com.au, in person to Gerard Puglisi, Next Gen Officer, or via post.
Future leadership of the Australian sugar industry looks to be in good hands given the levels of commitment and promise demonstrated by two emerging leaders at a recent residential course in Canberra.

Each year the Sugar Research and Development Corporation sponsors an emerging sugar cane industry representative to attend the eight-day Training Rural Australians in Leadership (TRAIL) program and an established leader to attend the more advanced Trail Blazers program.

Both programs are conducted by the Australian Rural Leadership Foundation which was established in 1992 to respond to emerging challenges for rural, regional and remote Australia.

The Foundation exists to create a network of leaders with compassion and commitment, strategic thinking and negotiating skills, and the foresight to influence communities, industries, businesses and policy makers.

In September last year, SRDC sponsored two participants to attend the TRAIL program. Australian Cane Farmers Association’s former Next Generation Officer, Ann-Louise O’Brien and Tully Cane Productivity Services’ Senior Extension Officer, Jordan Villaruz both spoke highly of the program afterwards.

Ann louise said she nominated for the program because she thought it was “a fantastic opportunity”.

“The most important skill I learnt from the course is to never stop learning and to keep an open mind,” she said.

“At Australian Cane Farmers, we’re very conscious that most Australian cane farmers are aged between 55 and 70 years. “It is vital we continue to encourage young farmers to stay in the industry. To do this we need to promote a variety of career pathways available to growers – both on and off farm.”

Jordan said that for him, the course was all about experiential learning, whereby the team observed and reflected on the behaviours and leadership styles of others during and after a team project.

During the course each member was allowed to become the group leader for a number of different activities.

Jordan said that after each activity the group had the opportunity to reflect and to discuss what they had learned about themselves, about other members of the group, and what they could have improved on or what they would like to change.

“It gave me an insight into how to deal with a group of people or an individual in certain situations,” he said.

“It is all about physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual approaches to leadership, because a good leader needs to be aware of these four basic behaviours.

“The course taught me to be more democratic in my approach when it comes to leadership and to try to understand and respect different people’s situations, their feelings, strengths and weaknesses,” he said.

For more information about the SRDC-funded TRAIL scholarship contact SRDC Senior Investment Manager, Bianca Cairns ph: (07) 3210 0495 bcairns@srdc.gov.au
Issues shared across industries

Australia produces some of the best and brightest farmers in the world. Greg Sweetnam spoke to two businesses very different to sugar cane and found the younger generation face similar challenges every day, no matter what their industry.

By Greg Sweetnam

Richard Clark, 29, of Westerway Raspberry Farm, Westerway, Tasmania, leads a long-distance farming existence. An ex-Reserve Bank employee, he lives in Sydney where he works three days a week in finance and the other two days on the family farm remotely from his home in the eastern suburbs enclave of Potts Point. For eight weeks in summer he takes leave from his finance gig and he’s in Tasmania working full-time for the peak harvest period.

Richard believes reducing risk is key to a long-term viable business for any farmer. For him, and perhaps for many young cane farmers with off-farm work commitments, there is also the emotional challenge of being away from the farm and maintaining a fair workload.

“That’s not an easy thing to do,” he says. “It’s hard because you feel you should be doing a lot more of the dirty work.

“It’s also been hard over the years taking holidays because you feel you should be at the farm working all the time. I think there is a fair bit of guilt that goes along with taking time away from the farm but you should be able to do that.”

Richard’s work ethic isn’t in question but it raises the issue of how to balance work on the farm. Without that, family farms can be difficult to manage. He says he, his father and brother divide the work on interest and skills. It makes sense to use his finance and economics background to benefit the business.

He is constantly reviewing and refining how Westerway does business to make the most of potential opportunities and maximise profits from the tonnes of fresh raspberries and other fruit sold at the farm gate each season, to the produce sold commercially for jams and spreads.

Two years ago he joined the board of Fruitgrowers Tasmania, which he says has been an invaluable experience. The organisation has been at the forefront of agri-politics in the past two years by backing the ban on New Zealand apples and working toward a biosecurity agreement with the state government that involves close to 20 industries.

Michael Vorras, 28, is the Australian vegetable industry’s current Young Grower of the Year and also has a keen business mind. He works in the family’s DSA Fresh company that supplies hydroponic lettuce, Asian-style vegetables and ready to go salads to the Adelaide markets, Coles supermarkets and independent grocers.

The family has 12 acres under shade cloth and an 800 square metre processing plant at the Direk, north Adelaide, farm.

Michael has been with the business full-time for eight years and oversees operations, production, marketing and distribution.

He says the past 12 months have been difficult for growers because of increasing input costs and falling margins.

“We have to become more efficient but costs are rising and returns are not increasing,” he says. “All along the supply chain for instance our costs are going up because of the carbon tax.”

The day-to-day work for Michael varies, from marketing duties and filling and dealing with sales orders, to organising the farm, including fertiliser application, making sure everything is operating and ensuring crops are free of bugs and disease.

Close to 90 per cent of the company’s produce is sold into the Adelaide markets and DSA Fresh has about 30 staff.

The business first explored hydroponics when Michael’s father, Mario, looked into the growing method 20 years ago. Twelve years later the family started to invest in the process.

To ensure the packaging and products are close to market trends, testing is used for feedback and fine tuning and this is paying dividends, Michael says, with the value-added packaged market growing dramatically in recent years.

As farming evolves Richard and Michael will face fresh challenges, just like young sugar cane farmers, and the true measure of their farming and business ability will be how they respond. Their experiences to date show that all industries have their difficulties but with astute decision-making, commitment and planning the outcomes can be uplifting.
Future-focused research
Research leading to innovation in cane farming practices
By BSES

BSES Limited (BSES) is the principal provider of research, development and extension (RD&E) to the Australian sugar cane industry.

By responding to industry’s needs to find ways to make sugar cane production more productive, profitable and environmentally sustainable, we deliver realised value to all businesses involved.

As well as finding innovative solutions for today’s issues, our research is focused on the future. Through identifying new products that can be produced from sugar cane we are committed to the growth of our industry’s long-term viability.

The good science that we do
We work in partnership with leading domestic and international scientific and funding organisations, such as CSIRO Plant Industry, DuPont, the Sugar Research Development Corporation and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Queensland. Reaching out to international sugar cane research organisations also allows us to create collaborative opportunities and bring more knowledge back for the benefit of our growers and millers.

Our RD&E focus and expertise spans plant breeding, biotechnology, farming systems and biosecurity.

Plant breeding
The BSES sugar cane breeding program is a fully integrated conventional and molecular breeding activity. Our selection program uses optimal genetic evaluation systems to select parents, crosses and clones to deliver new varieties that are more productive and disease resistant.

Variety introduction and variety exchange programs at both a domestic and international level enable the germplasm used for breeding and varietal development.

Trait development
The Trait Development program applies conventional breeding, plant molecular biology, transgenic technology and plant functional biology approaches to develop sugar cane with new and commercially important traits. These traits include pathogen and pest resistance, herbicide tolerance, drought tolerance and more efficient water and nutrient use.

Developing and implementing advanced micro-propagation technologies to accelerate variety release and adoption is also a major thrust of this program.

This program is conducted in collaboration with DuPont, CSIRO and the University of Queensland with the support from the Australian sugar cane industry and SRDC.

Biosecurity
Exotic diseases and pests represent a significant threat to the continued security of cane supply for the Australian sugar cane industry.

In collaboration with the Variety Improvement Program our biosecurity program aims to breed disease- and pest-resistant varieties and support quarantine and disease-free seed cane programs.

We also cooperate with federal and state government departments to prevent entry of these pests and to prepare for possible incursions.

Improved cropping systems
The Improved Cropping Systems Program focuses on developing farming systems that improve the sustainability and supply security of our customers.

By investigating the use of innovative technologies and practices for use on-farm, including the optimal use of sugar cane varieties, the program develops better management principles for success.

Many of the program’s activities are undertaken in collaboration with other organisations, including individual growers or grower-groups, productivity services, millers, harvesting contractors and manufacturers, National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture, Queensland government departments, CSIRO Ecosystems Sciences, various Natural Resource Management groups and other commercial companies.

Putting our science into practice
It’s important that research findings are translated into practical, usable information and outcomes that can be adopted on-farm.

The Development Officers from our Professional and Communication Extension Unit have a hands-on role in delivering research findings from us and the broader research community, to industry and growers.

They do this through conducting and participating in workshops, shed meetings and demonstration days in every cane growing region. They also work closely with local productivity boards, industry representatives and agri-businesses.

BSES uses the latest technology to deliver extension information and boasts a website that provides a range of publications, research reports, tools and other online resources.

Through our YouTube channel, the Australian Cane Learning Centre, we present timely and practical information using videos. The visual element of this medium allows the sometimes complex work our researchers do and the advice we provide, to be explained more easily.

Our emerging team members

Summer Olsen – Development Officer, Precision Agriculture
Summer holds a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Studies with Honours from Utah State University (USA) and joined BSES in 2012. As the Development Officer for precision agriculture she encourages the application of innovative farming practices and technologies to improve farm efficiency and profitability.
Great Land is an innovative technology that was introduced into Queensland cane fields in 2011. Great Land is a patented liquid product that contains a group of naturally occurring soil bacteria that interact with plants to accelerate the efficient use of nutrients in soil.

In cane fields in north Queensland treated with Great Land, significant increases have been seen in the rate of establishment, above ground growth and numbers of cane tillers, however the major differences are being observed in root growth, which should translate to increase in yield and profitability.

Great Land has been shown to improve phosphorus use efficiency, which could have implications for future reef regulations.

By Great Land

GREAT LAND YIELDS GREAT RESULTS

Not just lab tested, cane field proven.

Great Land is a new biotechnology product that’s not just proven in research, it’s proven where it counts – in cane fields across Queensland. So if you’re interested in a product that unlocks your soil’s true potential, and is better for your ground’s natural balance – get some Great Land.

Growing tomorrow.

See us at the trade stalls.

Phil-Anthony Patane – Development Officer, Harvesting

Phil-Anthony has a cane farming background and graduated from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Agricultural Science at the end of 2012. He is interested in encouraging the uptake of harvesting best practice (HBp) and exploring innovations in machinery management to improve farm efficiency and profitability.

Dr Nathalie Piperidis, Researcher

Nathalie joined BSES as a research scientist in 2005. Supported by a strong educational background which includes a master’s degree and a Ph.D. She has also enjoyed a lecturing career teaching genetics, physiology, biology, biotechnology. Nathalie works as a cytogenetist for the introgression of new genera. She is also involved in several other collaborative projects involving FISH, BAC FISH and GM-FISH techniques with the aim of improving the understanding of the complex genome of sugar cane.

Danielle Skocaj – Research Agronomist, Tully

Danielle comes from a Tully sugar cane farming family and has worked in the Burdekin and Tully districts as an Extension Officer. She is currently undertaking a Ph.D. at James Cook University investigating the potential for seasonal climate forecasting to improve sugar cane nitrogen management in the Wet Tropics.

The Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) works in partnership with the sugar cane industry and the Australian Government to foster an innovative and sustainable Australian sugar cane industry, through targeted investment in research, development and extension.

It is SRDC’s role to manage RD&E projects linked to goals and priorities identified by industry and Government across four programs.

Growing the Crop - A profitable and market driven industry underpinned by advanced technology producing a reliable and increasing supply of sugar cane,

Milling the Crop - A profitable milling sector utilising new and improved technologies and processes,

Sustaining the Environment – Coordinate, facilitate and extend, as appropriate, existing environmental stewardship programs, and

Skills and Capabilities - An industry committed to supporting a culture of education, learning and innovation.

SRDC aims to seek out and invest in strategic research, development and extension which will underpin an innovative and sustainable Australian sugar cane industry characterised by:

World-class farming, harvesting, transport and milling practices

• Average cane yields in excess of 100 tonnes per hectare

• Being capable of reliably exceeding 36 million tonnes of sugar cane per annum

• Providing leadership in environmental stewardship and social sustainability

• Extending the value proposition of the sugar cane plant.

SRDC believes in the value of investing in the future of Australian sugar cane researchers to ensure the industry maintains its competitive edge as a global leader in sugar cane production.
When Graham Pratt of P&G Harvesting in Mackay first purchased a Case IH Austoft 8000 cane harvester in 2009, he was impressed by the new technology, including the basecutter Autotracker system and cruise control.

“It means less manual tasks for the operator, and the Autotracker does an excellent and consistent ground job,” he says. “Now we are used to steering with the joy stick, we would not go back to a steering wheel. All the harvest functions are at our fingertips.”

P&G Harvesting now uses three Austoft 8000 harvesters, as well as Case IH tractors to transport their cane. Like many sugar cane growers in Australia, they’ve been able to improve productivity by adopting the latest advances in technology. These innovations also support improved profitability, with opportunities to reduce fuel and labour costs while increasing yields, supporting sustainable growth for the future.

Positioning for growth
Sugar cane is one of Australia’s largest rural industries and an important export commodity, with an annual gross production value of $1.5 billion. It is also the economic backbone of many communities in northern NSW and Queensland.

Growing demand for both food and alternative fuel sources provide significant opportunities for the sector, but it needs to continually improve productivity to compete with other major producers, such as Brazil.

“The outlook in this industry is one of cautious optimism,” comments Dale Chapple, Case IH Regional Sales Manager for NSW and Queensland. “The areas planted with sugar cane are now on the rise again as prices stabilise, so that’s a positive.”

Boosting efficiency under Australian conditions
At Case IH, every product and service development is driven by their customers’ need to work more efficiently. Each new model of equipment uses less fuel than its predecessor, needs less time to adjust and service, and can work the soil and crop more effectively.

For the 4,000 sugar cane farms in Australia, this means they can support improvements to capabilities at every step of the growing cycle.

“The Case IH Austoft cane harvester was the first harvester specifically developed for this industry,” says Dale. “Today, our machines are fully GPS guidance ready, and offer a range of technical features such as Autotracker, which is like a flight control deck to ensure efficient harvesting of your crop.”

John Ferguson from the AgNorth dealership in Ayr, visited Case IH factories in Brazil in 2009 to see the first prototypes of the Austoft 8000 harvester at work. He says it’s the best option for Australian conditions.

“One of the most impressive features of the 8000 series is its ability to give a clean sample and put more tonnes in the bin”

“Every time the weather disrupts harvesting, the Case IH Austoft machine will always stay in the paddock longer and get back earlier, due to its lighter weight,” he says. “Add in the reliability of the hydraulic and chopper systems, superior cleaning, operators comfort and local Case IH dealer network support… it brings efficiency to the cane harvesting industry.”

Austoft harvesters are also equipped with Smart Cruise, an intelligent engine for areas of high productivity.

“It adjusts your engine speed based on the load, for greater fuel efficiency,” explains Dale. “By lowering the cost of harvesting, you can improve the efficiency of operations.” Automating many functions
means there is also less stress on hydraulics – lowering fuel consumption, prolonging engine life and reducing time spent on maintenance.

In addition, all Case IH tractors and harvesters are also now Advanced Farming System (AFS) ready, so you can use their guidance procedures to make more precise decisions. This desktop software helps you control the entire crop production cycle and optimise yields.

“We also offer a full range of tractors, from 25 to 600hp, as well as hay equipment, combines and sprayers,” says Dale. “So you can use our equipment to take on any farm duty, from cultivation to sugar cane haulage.”

Maintaining a reputation for quality

Any advances in mechanisation cannot be made at the expense of the quality reputation of Australia’s sugar cane industry. So, the Case IH Austoft 8000 harvester also incorporates an Anti-Vortex primary extractor cleaning system.

“One of the most impressive features of the 8000 series is its ability to give a clean sample and put more tonnes in the bin,” says Graham. Independent tests showed his Case IH machine could provide a clean sample with minimal cane loss of 0.23-0.36 tonnes of sugar per hectare, depending on fan speed.

Increase profitability with lower input costs

John describes the difference a new Austoft 8000 harvester made to an operation in Burdekin, when it was delivered six weeks into the 2011 crush. “Once commissioned into its 24 hour two shift roster, it went on to cut over 200,000 tonnes in its first season. All with minimal downtime, and it finished the year with the original elevator chains intact.”

Sustainable growth with long-term support

Reducing the demands on fuel, land and water while still producing higher yields is also of benefit to the local environment. Like many other industries, sugar cane producers are mindful of environmental pressures, especially those located near the Great Barrier Reef and other coastal areas where sediment run-off and water quality are an issue.

Innovative control equipment, such as AFS, also supports sustainable growth by helping you make accurate decisions about crop varieties, planting, harvesting and quality. Case IH’s reliable customer support and factory upgrades through its local Dealer Network, which includes AgNorth, McDonald Murphy and QMAC Machinery in Queensland and Noel Graham Farm Machinery in NSW, is also reassuring for Australian producers.

Graham says his decision to purchase the Austoft 8000 series harvester was partly based “on the fact that I was happy with my previous Case IH machines, and I knew I could rely on McDonald Murphy to back them up.”

“It’s fair to say that we have had to continue to upgrade our service skills to support the machine,” says John of his team at AgNorth. “Case IH and the dealer group are continually looking at ways to improve (the Austoft 8000 series) and the first 8000 we delivered in 2009 now has the same hydraulic specification as the latest machines delivered for this harvest – without asking for owner contribution.”

Having watched the development of this advanced machinery from its first prototype, he concludes, “We’re very proud of the throughput and operating advantages that the 8000 brings to our customers.”

Case IH’s contribution to the industry

With a proud history of over 50 years of worldwide leadership in sugar cane technologies, Case IH provides a complete offering of first-class machinery for all sugar cane operations as well as qualified knowledge and a full range of services, including after-sales support, technical training, tailored financing solutions and advice on best practices to help the long term growth of its customers’ businesses.
Learning from legend

John Eales

John Eales AM will share his experience from both on the rugby pitch and in the business world, as he addresses the Case IH Step UP! conference of young and established cane professionals to talk about the traits of a business leader.

John is an Australian rugby union legend and the most successful captain in the history of Australian rugby. He was educated at Marist College, Ashgrove in Brisbane and at the University of Queensland before taking to the international rugby stage.

John debuted for the Wallabies in 1991 and captained the side from 1996 until the end of his test career in 2001. He participated in two successful World Cup campaigns, capturing the latter in 1999, and led Australia through three Bledisloe Cup and two Tri-Nations victories. He also led the side to Australia’s only victory against the British and Irish Lions in 2001.

John was also inducted into the Australia Institute of Sport’s Best of the Best in 2011, awarded the Australian Sports Medal in 2000 and made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1999 for services to the community and rugby.

While most fans can easily list his many sporting achievements, few people know the details of John’s impressive business resume, which includes being founder of the Mettle Group (now part of Chandler Macleod); sitting on the boards of Flight Centre, the Australian rugby Union, and GRM International; lecturing at the University of Notre Dame in Sydney; and consulting to the likes of Qantas and Fuji Xerox.

John is also author of Learning from Legends in Sport and Learning from Legends in Business and has been a contributor to the Australian Financial Review for the last 11 years.

Don’t miss his entertaining, inspirational and upbeat presentation.

Gala Dinner entertained by ‘Slammin’ Sam Kekovich

‘Slammin’ Sam Kekovich is one of the real personalities of AFL football and is an engaging host and entertaining storyteller.

A star player with North Melbourne and Collingwood, Sam Kekovich was an important factor in North Melbourne’s breakthrough Premierships triumph back in 1975. His playing career for more than a decade included running battles with coaches such as Ron Barassi. During his career, he played over 150 games, won a Club Best and Fairest in his second year, represented Victoria, and remained a colourful and a favourite topic for the sporting press.

Nowadays Kekovich enjoys playing the commentator and entertainer. He is a self made entrepreneur and media identity. His media credits include regular appearances on Channel 7’s Footy Show, co-host of Melbourne’s 3AK radio breakfast team and PTH Australia on ESPN, and presenter on Melbourne sports radio station, SEN 1116. He also appears on Triple M’s pre-match AFL coverage.

A naturally gifted entertainer, Sam brings a wonderfully satirical, irreverent and hard-hitting brand of humour to any occasion. His lively presentations draw on all his experiences and the characters he has encountered over the last 30 plus years of his involvement in football, and life.

He was the President of the Hammerheads, the Football Team created by Channel 7’s show The Club, and was the Chief Executive Officer of K Rock Radio in Geelong.

In recent years, Sam Kekovich has become the face of the meat and livestock advertising campaign for lamb where in true Kekovich style he has told the public to buy lamb or they’ll get a serve from him. The campaign has been a huge success with sales increasing by over one million serves per week.

“You know it makes sense, I’m Sam Kekovich”. This is not only the title of his top selling book, but has also become the catchcry of the flamboyant AFL personality.
Outlook testing

There’s never been a better time for young growers to come through the ranks and lead the sugar industry with new thinking and new ideas.

The passion and skills of emerging growers are needed now more than ever with tricky times ahead for Australian sugar businesses.

Chief national agribusiness forecaster, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), says there will be a record global sugar crop this season of about 177.6 million tonnes. That’s up 2.5 million tonnes on the previous year.

Forecaster Benjamin Agbenyegah says higher production will drive returns down though, and that’s going to bring a range of pressures for the industry.

“The average return to Australian sugar cane growers is forecast to decline by $5 a tonne to $38 a tonne (of cane),” Benjamin says. “This is in response to forecast lower world prices.”

The harvest pool return of Queensland Sugar Limited, which markets more than 90 per cent of Australia’s sugar exports, is forecast to be $462 a tonne this season – down from $518 a tonne last season.

The seasonal pool return averaged $352 a tonne in the past decade in today’s dollars.

The world indicator price for raw sugar is forecast to average US18 cents a pound this season or around 21 per cent lower than last season. That means Australian producers are in for a round of belt tightening.

Australia production is estimated to be about 4.5 million tonnes for the season – an impressive 21 per cent higher than last season. This forecast, released in December, reflects an increase in the area harvested and higher sugar yields driven by generally sunny and dry conditions in the 2012 harvest.

Sugar yields last season were below the historical average because large areas of cane were carried over from two years ago because of excessive rainfall.

Australia will also export more sugar this year in line with a bigger crop.

ABARES says that the national export forecast is for around 12 per cent to 3.4 million tonnes. However, the value of Australian sugar exports is forecast to drop by 9 per cent to around $1.6 billion. That reflects lower forecast world sugar prices.

With returns dipping, growers will be looking to curtail costs on the farm. Greater use of technology will help there while off farm there are a broad number of initiatives that are being watched with interest.

Higher yields through new planting methods, new uses for the crop, such as biofuels, are just a few of the many ways industry is looking to make the most of the sugar cane plant to bolster returns.

There is also intense interest in the performance of new varieties across all growing regions while cash crops, such as soy beans, will play an important part in sugar businesses this year.

By Greg Sweetnam
Floods in pictures

Recent floods have devastated cane farms in Queensland and NSW. Here are a few pictures from Bundaberg and the Tweed, that show the scale of the inundations and damage to crops.

Cane covered by 3-4 metres of water, Tweed.

Waters dangerously close, Bundaberg.

Bridge damage, Tweed.

Dead crops, Tweed.

From the air, Bundaberg.

From the air, Bundaberg.

Four days later the cane emerges, Tweed.

Three days after peak, Tweed.

From the air, Bundaberg.

400 metres of gravel used, Tweed.

Mooball, Tweed.
Like many Australian cane farmers, Gail and Geoff Hadlow from west of Proserpine, have experienced a few knocks since they started farming 15 years ago.

But it’s their sheer passion for the industry and the support of the Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA) that got them through the tough times.

When no one else listened to the plight of cane farmers, the ACFA was always there, Geoff said. “Government representatives don’t understand our language. I know that when I phone the ACFA with a problem someone is going to listen and do something about it.

“With deregulation, the ACFA has played an active role by negotiating contracts with sugar mills so we get better prices.

“The program ensures that tried and tested farming practices are transferred to young farmers”

“The group has also helped us greatly to deal with new government regulations on the use of pesticides and environmental management issues,” Geoff said.

Since its inception in 1907, the ACFA (formally the Australian Sugar Producers Association) has been a grass-roots peak body, representing the industry’s most valuable asset – its farmers.

The ACFA represents around 2,000 farmers across all key sugar regions in Queensland and Northern New South Wales with the aim of encouraging innovative farming techniques and industry best practice, as well as advocating for farmers within the supply chain.

Its board members are active cane farmers and its senior managers all have a personal connection and passion for the industry.

Ultimately, the ACFA provides a voice to all cane farmers in Australia at both an industry and government level, ACFA General Manager Stephen Ryan said.

“We are hoping to get funding for research to build the farmers’ case in this debate,” he added.

With many experienced cane farmers facing retirement, the ACFA has increased its efforts to foster and nurture the next generation of young cane farmers.

ACFA’s Next Gen program has been set up to do just this. “The Next Gen program gives young farmers the tools to improve their practical skills on the land as well as enhance their business acumen so that they can effectively run a successful cane farm,” Mr Ryan said.

“The program ensures that tried and tested farming practices are transferred to young farmers so that decades of knowledge and expertise are not lost.

“It also embraces what a new generation of farmer has to offer – an alternative approach to sustainable practices, exciting technology advancements, and a renewed enthusiasm for the industry’s future.

“Our hope is that the information and support we provide farmers will make them feel empowered in their businesses and encourage them to become leaders in their industry,” he added.
# What the ACFA offers farmers

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Become an ACFA member today by phoning 1800 500 025 or visit www.acfa.com.au for a form.

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## Suncorp Bank’s Agribusiness Team

Making local connections and providing market-leading products

### By Suncorp

Suncorp Bank is Australia’s leading regional bank, offering a strong suite of personal and business deposit and lending products through a national network of more than 240 branches and business centres and 2200 ATM access points. Suncorp Bank has built genuine connections with more than one million customers and prides itself on offering a strong value proposition around market-leading products and customer service and satisfaction.

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Robert Drewitt – District Manager
Agribusiness on 0427 147 239

**Innisfail**

Patrick Russell – District Manager
Agribusiness on 0409 840 094

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*See us on Day 2, Main Room*
QSL: growing profitability for the Australian sugar industry

By QSL

With the 2013 crush only a few months away, it is a good time to reflect on the role QSL plays within the Queensland sugar industry and why we do the things that we do.

Our number one priority is to maximise returns for our members and we have a plan for doing this across the business. QSL’s business can be broadly reflected in four key areas — pricing, logistics, financing and marketing. The table below provides a summary of our priorities across these four key business areas.

For the upcoming season QSL will continue to focus strongly on:

- continuing to build and foster stronger ties with our grower members through improving education and communication, especially regarding their pooling and pricing options;
- further strengthening the long-term relationships we have with our Asian customers and matching the quality we deliver to their specific needs so that we provide them with greater value and maximise our premium;
- operating the terminals efficiently and negotiating cost-effective chartering so that the costs you see through the shared pool are as low as possible;
- developing activities such as buying and selling other origin sugar and using the surplus terminal capacity to generate other income to offset our marketing costs; and
- building our relationship with our banking syndicate and maintaining our strong credit rating so the advances program is competitively priced.

Contact QSL’s Industry Relationship Managers:
Cathy Kelly: Cathy.Kelly@qsl.com.au / 0409 285 074
Carla Keith: Carla.Keith@qsl.com.au / 0409 372 305

Face of the industry

By Greg Sweetnam

Samuel Mischke is the face of the Australian sugar industry’s future.

He’s young, keen and has an outstanding work ethic - like most, if not all, of the next generation of growers coming through the ranks to take their place.

Samuel is also modest about his abilities too, so rather than talk about himself he’d rather talk about the industry and where it’s going.

At 20 he has a full-time job out of season at a prawn farm that sees him work near the family farm from about 3.30am each day. In season he works on the home sugar cane farm at Rocky Point. The 115-hectare family farm supplies cane to Rocky Point Mill and trash to Rocky Point Mulching.

Like the sons of any farming family, Samuel looks to the future and what innovation is emerging that could increase returns. He’s particularly keen on what plant breeding will bring.

“I’m interested in new varieties of sugar cane and what canes are going to give us better fibre and sugar content,” Samuel says outside the machinery shed on Stapylton-Jacobs Well Road.

“My work ethic is key to my success. I think that’s the direction we need to go in. Ways to increase yields is always interesting.”

A challenge for Samuel and most younger growers, is having to work off-farm to ensure he stays involved in the family sugar cane business. Besides his work at the prawn farm, Samuel has also worked at Rocky Point Mill for a year and spent time in other mill areas driving and learning more about how things are done.

His father, Lindsay, says Samuel has always shown a keen interest in farming.

“If Samuel is a sign of what the future holds for sugar cane farming in Australia then the industry should be well pleased. Sugar has a lot to look forward to as young growers take their place and embrace the next phase of the growth and change.”
As suppliers and shareholders, cane farmers are reaping rewards from Daintree Estates cocoa

Looking back 10 years, Daintree Estates Australian Cocoa was little more than a wild idea to do something no one in Australia had ever been game to try: to grow cocoa in Far North Queensland and then, using that local-origin cocoa, to create the finest quality chocolate in the most ethical and equitable way possible.

In other words, encourage local farmers to grow cocoa using state-of-the-art agricultural methods so they can enjoy the rewards of the finished product by being part of a profit-sharing Company.

Daintree Estates cocoa is really about the growers in Far North Queensland who took a chance—a chance that is now going to be commercialised.

Just like cocoa growers in the developing world, our growers make the most of the abundant natural rainfall in their region and ensure that their plots get exactly the right amount of nutrients and water.

The cocoa company
Most of Daintree Cocoa’s growers are actually sugar cane farmers. Many are from families with farming histories that date back generations.

So why change? Because the price of sugar can rise and fall. And when it falls, the cane farmers profitability suffers.

Having a crop like cocoa enables them to even out the uncertainties of a commodity like sugar. It helps them make sure there is a future in their farm that they can pass on to the next generation.

As shareholders in the chocolate company, our growers have a real incentive to stay involved. A grower director also represents them on the board. It allows them to share in the value-adding of Daintree Estates cocoa for years to come.

For further information, visit www.daintreeestates.com or phone Gerard Puglisi on 0428 988 136.
Sustaining the environment

On the final day of the conference, delegates will visit the farm of sugar cane climate champion, New South Wales sugar cane grower, Robert Quirk. Here he explains how he’s using technology and changing practices to make his farm more sustainable.

By Robert Quirk

Region: Tweed River, New South Wales coastal region
Commodities: Sugar cane and cattle
Farming area: 126 hectares of sugar, plus land for a few cows
Rainfall: 1600 mm rainfall per year

Climate change - warmer earlier summers

We are one of the few areas in the world that will benefit from climate change. We’ll get warmer winters and hotter summers, so we’ll become more tropical. That will be a plus for us because sugar cane needs heat and sunshine to grow.

But there’s a downside. Cyclones will come 500 km further south for every degree the ocean warms, and 2.5°C would put us right in the cyclone impact zone. Science suggests the ocean will probably rise about 1 cm per year. The farm is only 50 cm above sea level now, so we have a problem.

I’ve noticed changes in the climate. Back in 1959, no-one cut ratoon cane before early September (after being cut, sugar cane re-grows from the same stems the following year; this is ‘ratoon cane’). Now we’re cutting it in June/July, at least six weeks earlier.

No one ever planted before the first week in September. Now we can start in early August, as long as the weather and the temperature are right. Sugar cane needs a ground temperature of 17°C for the ratoons to shoot, and 19°C for the plant to strike. Those temperatures are coming much earlier.

We’ve got a thermometer in the swimming pool which reflects what the soil temperature is doing pretty well. If the water in the pool is 18°C, we can plant our cane. It’s just a theory but it seems to work for us.

Drainage, pumps and the threat of sea level rise

Sea level rise is the big concern for us. Projections are for about a centimetre a year, and we’re only 50 cm above sea level, so in 50 years we won’t have any drainage at all.

Drainage mitigation (the Government) straightened the creek in 1964 and fitted modern floodgates. That was the start of the drainage system we have built on ever since.

We pump water out every day. The pumps used to be manually operated, so every morning I’d walk down and see the water had risen through the soil profile, bringing iron and aluminium to the surface and killing the cane.

Now they’re automatic and start as soon as there’s a 10 cm rise in the drainage system, and that’s made a real difference. We pump about 4.5 mL an hour into the river.

But it won’t be enough to save us if sea levels rise. Within 30 years, we won’t have enough freeboard (the distance between the water level and soil surface) to be able to pump all the water out.

Coping with acid sulfate soils

All the farming techniques we use to cope with acid sulfate soils also help reduce our greenhouse gas emissions. This was accidental to some degree – we had to beat the soil problem – but now we’re very...
I’ve seen a photo from 1962 showing the burnt-out acid sulfate soils. We used to have holes through the crop where the cane was killed by the acid and salt coming up from underneath. There was a big fish kill here in 1987 and everything in the river died. In the past, the community had blamed the sugar industry. They said the mill and farmers were putting pesticides and poisons in the river, even though the mill wasn’t working at the time.

Eventually Clive Easton, an entomologist working for Tweed Shire Council, said, ‘I think this is a result of acid sulfate soils and acid discharge.’ He did some tests and it was, so we had to work out how to deal with the problem. There were 50 tonnes of oxidised sulfuric acid per hectare.

Neutralisation wasn’t an option because there was too much acid, so we sat down with Ian White from CSIRO and Mike Melville from the University of New South Wales to work out how we could contain the acid in the landscape.

The first step was laser-levelling the paddocks. The natural slope was away from the drains, so we had to turn it around. ‘We’ve given the fields a gradient of 0.6%, so everything runs down to the drains and out through the pump. The scalped areas affected by acid and salinity disappeared virtually as soon as we laser-levelled the paddocks.

Laser levelling has been the most expensive remediation work we’ve done, but we saw a return from the year we did it. Now everybody’s laser levelling, everybody’s liming and everybody has a drainage management plan. We are pretty much on top of the problem now.

**Building the mounds**

The spaces between the rows are highly compressed by tractor traffic and impervious to water. We plant and cultivate using GPS systems, and tractor traffic has created hard zones between the rows.

We decided to mound the soil and grow the cane above the surface of the ground, between the compacted tracks, to create a micro-environment. The top of the mound is the only bit we work. The fertiliser goes on there. When the watertable rises, it has to pass through the lime in the mound, and this neutralising medium captures the acid and the nitrous oxide.

Also, when you add nitrogen to anoxic (without oxygen) soils, it volatises and turns into nitrous oxide, which is a nasty greenhouse gas. The soil in our mounds has oxygen in it, so mounding improves our soil and it also reduces our greenhouse emissions.

We don’t lose the nutrients through volatilisation, so we’ve been able to cut the fertiliser way back to about 50% of what we used to use.

The mounds are heavily limed at 10 tonnes of lime per hectare-equivalent, so they’re pretty healthy. The hard zones have a pH of 3.7 (about as acidic as tomato juice), while the mounds have earthworms in them. And earthworms start to survive at around a pH of 6.0 (about as acidic as milk).

Liming was expensive. We’ve got enough calcium in the system to grow ten crops of sugar cane, but all the carbonate is used up neutralising the acidity. So we’re actually putting the lime on for environmental rather than agronomic benefit. It took us about five years to get the system to work, and it cost a lot of money, but the results have been worth it.

**Trash retention reduces greenhouse gas, good for the soil**

I don’t burn the cane. Instead, I leave the trash on the ground after harvesting. The scientists doing research on the farm helped us work out our processes of trash retention and mounding. It meant a lot of experimenting and some failures, but we eventually got it right.

Brazils cut ten times as much cane as Australia and they don’t burn trash at all. If you burn the cane, you retain the potassium and phosphorous, but all the nitrogen’s gone.

The latest research shows that 50% of all the available nitrogen to the crop comes from the breakdown of organic matter, so if you keep organic matter on the ground you can use a lot less fertiliser. Sugar cane has big biomass: 100 to 150 tonnes per hectare.

CSIRO found microbes in my fields that were not present in fields where trash was burnt. So retaining trash is the main thing. We’ve got earthworms – we’ve got all the little goodies that convert organic matter to nitrogen and other available nutrients.

**Break crop of soybeans to keep the soil healthy**

We do four years of cane, one year of beans, and then back to cane, to break the monoculture. We get the same amount of cane off that four years as we would growing cane five years straight, we can make money on the beans, and the soil health is also much better.

The beans break the monoculture cycle. They kill some of the nematodes. We don’t need any fertiliser on the plant crop, and they make the soil healthy. Before, when the birds followed the ripper or the cultivator, they were eating cane grubs (a native and significant cane pest), but now they’re eating earthworms.

**Smarter farming reduces inputs**

We used to cultivate every week. So 16 or 17 times in a year, we’d go over the whole farm destroying the organic matter, killing weeds, ripping the roots off and all the things you don’t really want to do. We now do minimum to zero tillage – this allows us to cut in much wetter conditions without damage to the soil or crop.

Now we’ve turned to zero-till and the only cultivation is raking the tops off the stool (the stumps of the cut cane) so we can add the fertilizer and raise the temperature in the mound. Instead of heavy ripping and bustling, we’re spraying. It’s chemical weed control. The energy costs have gone down enormously and so have the tractor hours. It’s the biggest technological change we’ve made in my 50 years of farming.

**Article and images courtesy of the Managing Climate Variability Program**

Robert talks soils with climate champion Bill Hunt.
Regional round-ups

2013 has had a heart-breaking start for some cane farmers, with heavy rain bringing floods to many areas. From the Tweed to Herbert to the Burnett River district, farmers are rebuilding after the devastating floods.

Thankfully, some areas aren’t doing it so tough and good crops are forecast.

Here, each of the ACFA Regional Directors give a round-up on their patch, as at 20 February 2013.

Since these reports were written, a second major flood event in northern NSW wreaked havoc and hampered recovery in this area. Both State and Federal governments announced financial assistance would be made available in 11 local government areas affected by this flood incident. Primary producers will be recipients of some of this funding. For more information about disaster assistance go to www.emergency.nsw.gov.au or www.disaster.qld.gov.au

New South Wales

Australia Day will be remembered in southern Queensland and northern NSW for all the wrong reasons. For two years in a row on Australia Day we have had heavy flood rain, in some areas giving us the biggest floods on record.

The floods in NSW delivered varying degrees of damage. The initial storm front stalled over the north western part of the Tweed River catchment delivering between 1100 and 1500 mm of rain in four days, before moving on to the upper catchment of the Richmond and Clarence Rivers. The upstream cane growing areas of the Richmond and Clarence sustained substantial damage, while other areas fared much better.

As most farmers in the industry are now aware, ACFA has made the commitment to support and encourage next generation of farmers in our industry

Some areas of the Tweed recorded the highest flood levels in memory, while others compared it to 1954 and 1974 – a little below or above those benchmark floods. The 1893 floods were much higher but we have very few benchmarks for that flood.

The Tweed has sustained a lot of damage in some areas, with one grower reporting he has never lost cane from flooding in his almost 60 years of growing cane, but this year he will plough out 40 acres as a total loss.

If there is an upside to events like these, then it is that two varieties have risen to the top (pardon the pun) as being able to survive this type of event in NSW. Q208: while it has sustained some minor damage, it has come through the flood event remarkably well. The other variety that has done well is BN 3120. While the latter does not have great sugar, it is most certainly better than a total loss, and I feel sure that growers will take the risk of low sugar against a loss from flooding.

At the time of writing this, NSW farmers were in the midst of yet another deluge of rain. It is too early to predict what the impact will be, but needless to say, it will make 2013 a difficult year for many of us.

The NSW Cane Growers Council and ACFA will continue to work with both State and Federal politicians to achieve flood recovery grants for the growers in each river system. These grants are only for damage to infrastructure, which in some cases has been enormous, and will be very necessary to aid many growers in the recovery from these floods.

Robert Quirk, NSW Director

Mossman

For Mossman, the start of 2013 continues to be better than last year. For most of January the northern region had ideal weather, with good growing conditions. We were receiving most of our rain at night with hot and humid days. These favourable conditions have also enabled farmers to continue their weed management programs.

Most of the early wet weather can be contributed to ex-cyclone Oswald, where farmers Mulgrave North escaped most of the damage that was received by our less fortunate southern neighbours. In the Mossman and Tableland regions reports of damaged crops have been reported to local field staff. Some isolated farms received damage to some of their early cut and plant cane blocks. The varieties that have been reported to have received the most damage are Q208, Q231 and Q138, with lodging and broken tops. The overall damage to the region is minimal and with a month left of the cyclone season, I feel that this event will have a minor effect to the 2013 crop estimate. I would like to express my sympathy to all farmers throughout the industry affected by this extreme weather event.

While it is still early in the 2013 season, I am still hopeful of a crop estimate of 550,000 to 560,000 tonnes for the Mossman region and over 1,000,000 tonnes for the Mulgrave area.

As most farmers in the industry are now aware, ACFA has made the commitment to support and encourage next generation of farmers in our industry, and ACFA has developed the Next Gen program to fulfil this. Since the start of 2013, I have had the pleasure of being the person to carry out the in-field work as the Next Gen Officer. Over the last few months I have been working my way through the industry from Mossman to my final destination of the NSW Northern Rivers’ Mills.

It is my job to visit Next Gen farmers and cane professionals across all major sugar cane regions, listening to their issues and providing younger farmers with useful industry advice. Young cane farmers in particular are crying out for industry knowledge and advice that will help them run profitable businesses into the future.

For anyone with a computer or a smart phone, you can follow my progress through the industry and ask me any questions on the Next Gen Facebook page.

Gerard Puglisi, Northern Director
Herbert
A month ago we had a cyclone that dumped around 26 inches of rain that caused flooding in the Herbert region. Major flooding occurred in the Halifax area with some flooding in the town area.

Once the cyclone passed we were hit with gusty westerly winds with temperatures just under 43 degrees at Abergowrie and the humidity in full swing at 9.00am in the mornings. There was no other way to describe it other than ‘cruel’. Even walking down the main street of Ingham I saw people diving into air conditioned shops, just to stay cool.

Before the rains, smut was quite prominent in some paddocks, but the rain seems to have helped alleviate this problem to some degree. Smut seems to be minimal on a district basis, showing up in old and some blocks are still waterlogged from the rain. Feral pigs are still a problem – they are moving around wallowing in the drills, helping themselves to the young cane stalks. Farmers need to be ever vigilant in going after these feral pests.

The Productivity Services are in the process of putting together the Herbert Sugar Industry Report in conjunction with the BSES. They are also carrying out a Productivity Review, which will be out shortly.

We are all looking forward to a better year this year.

Carol Mackee, Herbert Region Director

Burdekin
The weather has been generally drier than usual for this time of year, with only scattered rain and thunderstorms across the district. The humidity makes for unpleasant days for us, but the crop should be enjoying the growing conditions, despite the late end to the 2012 season.

“For many of the cane farmers, the rain came none-too-soon for high-ground crops but has been devastating for many low-lying crops”.

Industry participants enjoyed a Next Gen BBQ in Ayr recently, with ACFA and Next Gen shirts, caps, pens, drink coolers, key rings and Great Land products all given out to lucky attendees. It was great to see so many new faces as well as many regulars. The aim was to make the BBQ’s an opportunity for industry workers to socialise and relax, as well as find out about new products and opportunities in the industry.

Crop-wise there is some good cane out there and also some rubbish as well. We need to get over past floods, cyclones and disease to be able to get back into full production. A typical estimation for this years crop is around 4 million to 4.1 million tonnes. We need lots of sunshine to dry out paddocks as some blocks are still waterlogged from the rain.

Industry meetings have commenced and growers grouping and planting incentive applications are being assessed before the 2013 season. Growers are preparing for early planting of cane and planting of alternative crops is well under way or approaching harvest. Mung beans, which is in short supply, is a popular break crop this year.

Ratoon trials on alternative crop nutrition products are showing great results and are continuing at Airville and in the BRIA, with involvement and data collection from BPS. Early plant cane trials will also begin in the New Year on these products. The objective of the trials has been to test planting mixtures and products against traditional cane farming methods and products for the area. Trials are also under way on fallow crops locally.

Margaret Menzel, Burdekin Director & Deputy Vice-Chair

Central Region
The weather finally broke and falls of over 100mm fell the weekend before Christmas. Similar falls fell again just before the New Year. This enabled the crop to get away and growers to get their spray programs underway. The control of weeds is not as good as it used to be. It will take time to manage the use of the limited range of available herbicides.

Towards the end of January we received falls of over 300 mm which was welcome. The weather depression, which brought this rain, ended up causing a great amount of grief to Eastern Australia before it was all over. To date we have had about 700 mm since Christmas.

There are varying estimates being expressed for this coming season. A crop of 5.5 million tonnes should be there, all going well. It is felt that damage to early-cut cane in 2012 will pull back the crop size. There is an increase of planted area that will help off-set the damage. As the price keeps working its way back, good crops are necessary.

Steve Fordyce, Central Region

Southern Qld
The floods have really taken their toll in our region. Many places have been inaccessible due to damaged roads, even when he floodwater had receded after the first deluge (see pics). Then came the second heavy rain fall with an intention of adding insult to injury.

During the first deluge, the Burnett River peaked at the highest level on record – around nine metres above the usual in the Bundaberg town reach. The odd thing about it is the change in dynamics of the water flows, as the last few meters came along. Interference patterns in the water shows up in images when the sun and angles are right, and these micro highs and lows seem to be what created the effect of one thing being destroyed while another nearby is almost untouched.
And, what can you say about the men in the tinnies? These local blokes in the dark, came out of nowhere to save people sitting on roofs and disappeared again without telling anyone their names. Thank God they were there!

For many of the cane farmers, the rain came none-too-soon for high-ground crops but has been devastating for many low-lying crops. For the entire spring the region was way below average for rainfall. Spring planted sugar cane and soybean were desperately seeking water. Very few farmers were able to keep the water up to the crops. This was for two reasons: first, evaporation rates were monstrous; and second, many farmers have been unable to fund low-electricity-burning irrigation plant.

Looking to the future, irrigation is something that we need to look at again, sooner or later. We need to get together and discuss the different irrigation systems out there and cost structures. Things have changed and we need to work out how to do it profitably.

Michael E Hetherington, Southern Region Director

Tableland, Babinda, Innisfail, Tully

The cane is of good colour and growing rapidly, nurtured by clear sunny days and intermittent showers. The monsoon has been mild and some crops have put on 1.5 – 2.0m of cane. Vines and weeds are also growing prolifically and high-rise sprayers are out in force doing battle. Machinery sales are active with half a dozen or so new harvesters sold for the 2013 season. Beetle flights are unusually rare as the drier conditions have not yet triggered their activity.

John Blanckensee, Independent Director
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