Shoe Leather the Best Fertiliser

I read an article quoting an award winning wine maker who said that “Shoe leather was the best fertiliser”. It didn’t make that much sense at first and I thought it might be his local equivalent of grinding up goats horns and planting on the blue moon. However, he went on to explain that, at daylight each morning, he walked the entire vineyard and that allowed him to pick up issues with the crop and other aspects of farm management a lot quicker than he otherwise would. The daily ritual improved his response time when something went wrong, whether that be weeds, insects and pests, disease or even drainage issues.

In an industry where so many of us have off farm jobs, keeping in touch with the crop is critical and the impact of any delay in taking action is magnified. Sugar cane is a very forgiving crop but that can allow us to become a little complacent at times. Looking around the area at the moment it’s not difficult to see the difference between crops where weed management has been timely and those where there has been a delay and the weeds have got away. That inability to get on top of weeds early has put a ceiling on potential productivity in some cases and ensured the crop has had to compete for nutrients and moisture through a long, dry summer. Setting a regular time to get around the farm and then responding to issues as quickly as possible will save you time, and add to your bottom line, even if it wears out a little shoe leather or tyre rubber.

2017—a very dry wet year

In the 2017 Crop and Productivity Report, which is included with this edition of Stalk Talk, I referred to 2017 as seemingly being one of the “driest” wet years we’ve had. At the time that was just a guess based on the long dry period through Jul—Sep when we recorded just 18.8 mm over three months with rain on just 4 days of the 92 day winter period. So I did some rooting about in the numbers just to see how 2017 stacked up against previous years. In 2017 we received 1,962 mm of rain and it rained on 126 days — so an average of 15.6 mm/wet day. Let’s compare that to 2016 when we recorded just 959 mm over 121 rainy days. That’s just five less wet days but over one metre less rain, which, for me at least, is pretty remarkable. The average rain per wet day was around half the previous years. In 2017 we received 1,742 mm over just 105 days (16.6 mm/wet day) and the record since 1915 was set in 1962—when 2,300 mm was recorded over just 123 wet days (18.7 mm/wet day).

Split Personalities

Work done by Nicholson and Long (2015) grouped Australian farmers in four broad personality types:

- **Dependables** - good attention to detail, are reliable and can work to a deadline. They like solid facts and are good working to a procedure.
- **Doers** - like to keep busy but also good with details but aren’t interested in theory. Enjoy practical tasks and spend more time on technical aspects of farming.
- **Pioneers** - often the first to try new things but have less focus on details. Begin with the big picture and work out the details on the way. Good problem solvers, planners and innovators but can become bored with repetitive work.
- **Team Builders**—strategic thinkers with more of a people focus. They are good at developing a vision and getting others to support them in it.

None of us are likely to be exclusively one particular personality type but most of us will fit into one of the broad categories.
The studies of Australian agricultural producers were split across three farming types, intensive livestock, beef and cropping and its likely that cane farmers have a similar make up to the croppers. More than three quarters of cropping farmers fall into either Dependable & Doer categories. Both of these groups prefer dealing with details—an approach that relies on the presentation of facts in a logical, sequential order, relies on the five senses and presents information in a practical, down-to-earth style. In short, they need to understand the details first before they can build up the big picture. The remaining 23% are divided into Pioneers and Team Builders. These groups prefer to see the big picture first and then fit the detail pieces into the puzzle as their understanding develops.

So why is this important? Well this and other studies show that our personalities impact on the way we process information and how we think and make decisions. That has important implications for how we communicate information and help you understand any potential changes or advances in farming techniques or new products.

Crop Chasers
If you’ve received this Stalk Talk then you will also have received your copy of the 2017 Crop & Productivity Report along with it. The 2017 Crop & Productivity Report primarily focusses on the results from the last harvest, and where appropriate, we have included some specific details that relate to your farm. Like last year, we have compared farm and varietal performance using a number of measures including cane yield (t/ha), CCS, sugar yield (t/ha) and Net Returns ($/ha) and also provided some rankings for the broad areas of the growing area. We would suggest not to focus too much on the rankings—if everyone lifts their productivity by 5% then your position won’t have changed but you’ll still be better off—it’s more important how you perform against yourself than against others so it’s more important that you use this as a basis for identifying where you might be able to squeeze a bit more out of the lemon. Look at the analysis of some of your old varieties or ratoons and see if they are ready for the off or look at the new varieties you’ve taken and see if they are performing up to standard. We hope you get something out of it and would like you to

No Drama Bin Loading
Well hopefully anyway... There are a couple of private firms that have expressed an interest in transporting soybeans so we thought we’d share the details.

- Multi –bin Transport on office@multibintransport.com.au or call Peter Bryant on 0448 774 162 or check their website www.multibintransport.com.au for more contact details.
- Rosey's Bulk Haulage on 0437 963 976.

Not Getting Off Scott Free
The Scots played a big part in the settlement of the Clarence Valley and a quick look through the current grower lists will tell you there presence is still around. Campbell’s, Cameron’s, Munro’s, Gregor’s, McIntyre’s, McFarlane’s, McClaren’s and McSwan’s abound. Others among us take our heritage through the matrilineal line like Ian Thompson, whose farm Kisdrama is named for the village of Kendram on Skye where many of the forebears of the Clarence Valley Scots originated from. Maclean is known globally for its Highland Gathering and many growers are involved but few more so then John McPhee and Graham Anderson. They've both been busy preparing for a few of his favorite Highland Gathering events—check him out in all his glory at the Showground at Easter. Graham “Braveheart” Anderson is heading along too.

McPhee and Graham Anderson. They've both been busy preparing for the upcoming festivities at Easter on 30 and 31 March and we’ve shared some pictures of what they’ve been up to.

Cheers from Alister & Mark