Ag Newsletter—Clarence—May 2018

Harvest Time!
Harvest time has rolled around a little earlier this year and caught some of us (well me anyway) a little short. We will hold our pre-harvest breakfast meetings a couple of days into the crush with the first at Andrew Fischer’s shed on Thursday, 7th June. Following this first meeting at approximately 10.30 am at the Mill Farm we will have a demonstration of strip-tillage with Evan & Milton Lewis’ Kuhn Krause strip tiler. The second pre-harvest meeting will be held at Allan Munro’s shed at Woodford Island on the 8th June. Breakfast will be served on both days from 7.00 am with the meeting kicking off from 7.45 am. We will have a run down of activities in the mill and refinery, a report on cane supply and logistics and Chris Connors will also be present to give an industry update.

No Show—No Worries
We missed the show this year due to the substantial damage done to the Maclean Showground from the severe January thunderstorms. So, when we found an old newspaper and discovered it had the show results from 1982 we thought we’d run with those instead. NCo310 was the major “show” cane, the early 80’s equivalent of Empire. John Harvey claimed both first and second prize with two separate entries of NCo310. Jeff Anderson, just a young bloke of 48 at the time, came in third with three stalks of Q68. John Harvey also won the prize for Highest CCS for 2YO cane with some NCo310 that went 15.43. Shannon & Cameron won the champion 2YO stool while Geoff Farlow took out the 1YO stool category. Des Wiblen won the Weight & CCS prize.

Obviously the cane awards are the ones of most interest to us but looking into the fruit and vegetable section also provided some interesting details. The 1982 Champion Choko Grower was Louanne Ensbye with second place going to James Moloney of Tyndale (who has since thankfully taken up cane farming) and in third place a very young Jodie Anderson. Just why these otherwise lovely people would bother to cultivate a vegetable that is ugly, slimy, almost tasteless and has little if any nutritional value, I just don’t know, (actually its high in Vitamin C but I’d rather an orange).

While the vegetables were ugly there was no shortage of beauty amongst the Maclean Showgirls back then. Pictured above right are the 1981 Showgirl Nola Anderson (now Moloney), the 1982 Showgirl winner, Leanda Shedden, and other 1982 contestants Jennifer Clark and Leanne Bowler.

The Stuntman’s after your RSD
Anyone remember Paul Hogan’s stuntman character from his 70s comedy specials? Well our very own stuntman, Dicky (right), is on the move again. He has already started checking for Ratoon Stunting Disease in ASP & Mother Plot so if you have some planting material that you need to ensure is RSD free then get him on the blower—0407 299 182.
Mill Mud

Included with this mail out are a circular outlining changes to charges for mill mud deliveries. A mill mud form is also included. Please return your form to me at the mill via the post or email to mmudorders@sunshinesugar.com.au. We can also provide mill ash as dump at the wet dump price. While this product is significantly different to mill mud it can be effectively used as a soil ameliorant. Please contact me if you are interested.

As I have mentioned here before, if your land is transitioning out of cane then we aren’t in a position to supply mill mud under these arrangements. The costs are heavily subsidised by the rest of the sugar industry. So if you want mud but aren’t growing cane, please make any requests through your relevant producer body and they will provide you with the appropriate charges.

Variety Guide—Meeting

The table on the right shows the top 10 varieties in terms of harvested tonnes for Qld and NSW in the 2017 season. They make for an interesting comparison. Q208 is the dominant variety across all mill areas and all regions and now represents around one-third of the cane crushed in Australia (a fraction less in Qld (30%) than in NSW (34%). The major varieties are similar with Q183, Q240, Q232 and KQ228 all there or thereabouts thought the proportions vary. We have some “legacy” varieties like BN83-3120 and Empire, which are a declining but still significant proportion of our crop. Q242, which is already Top 10 in Qld has yet to reach that level here. Q238 is predominantly grown in Central & Southern regions but is highly susceptible to Chlorotic Streak, making it less suitable for our wetter climate while MQ239 is exclusively grown in the Herbert District and is a low CCS, higher yielding variety—another BN83-3120 and we don’t need another. Q200 is grown here but has never really taken off. While described as performing well in waterlogged conditions has only intermediate resistance to Chlorotic Streak, which is counterintuitive to my mind. Q250 is predominately grown in the Northern Region and in the Herbert. It’s a high CCS variety with relatively good resistance to or tolerance or most diseases. We’ll release our own Variety Guide for Harwood in June and have a walk through the ASP/Mother Plot in July.

Acid Sulphate Soils

Acid Sulphate Soils are natural sediments that contain iron sulphides. If disturbed or exposed to air these soils can release acid that can kill animals, aquatic life and plants. As the map on the right shows, most if not all, of our growing area falls within the high probability area (though much of it is at a depth that doesn’t really worry us).

The NSW Sugar Industry controls on-farm management of acid sulphate soils (ASS) through a unique industry-government self-regulation scheme. It allows us to proactively manage the acid sulphate risk and demonstrate to government that we are competent managing the environmental risk. I have included the 2017-18 Acid Sulphate Soils Compliance Record in this mailout. Please complete it and retain with your farm records. Ten farms will be selected at random later in the year by Clarence Valley Council and will receive an audit from a CVC employee and myself.

Get In the Zone

Zonal or strip tillage is the practice of limiting cultivation to the row area (zone or strip) while the inter-row is left undisturbed. Minimum till or no-till systems have significant advantages over conventional farming but, in our system, where high levels of trash and cool soil temperatures can cause poor germination it’s less practical. US studies show strip tillage improved soil temperature by as much as 5-7°C compared to no-till systems and was on par with full tillage system. Work done as part of the Sugar Yield Decline Joint Venture (SYDJV) showed that there was no negative impact on yields from moving from conventional tillage to zonal tillage but there can be some very significant advantages. It allows cane roots better access to nutrients and water by improving water infiltration and reducing leaching, improves soil structure, supports soil biota, reduces soil organic matter losses and reduces erosion. Zonal tillage can also have substantial financial savings. Braunack found that under a conventional farming system (2 passes with rotary hoe and 4 passes with offset discs between 140-180L/ha will be used whilst under a zonal tillage system that is reduced to just 25-45L/ha - a potential saving of up to $175/ha. It can also reduce tractor hours from 20-35 hours/ha to just 5-10 hours/ha, further reducing running costs and repairs and maintenance and freeing up time for other activities or to cover more ground. But perhaps the most relevant saving for us at this time year is that, with less soil disturbance, wet weather delays are reduced. That means harvesters can get back on more quickly without damaging ratoons and you can get back on for other field operations like planting or herbicide application in a more timely fashion. We’ll have a display of strip tillage equipment following the breakfast meeting on 7th June at the Harwood Mill Farm at 10.30 am.

Cheers from Alister & Mark