Cool Runnings

I was speaking with one of our more experienced growers recently and he mentioned that he thought this was one of the worst planting seasons in memory. Having arrived back in the middle of the 2010 harvest I was a little surprised by this comment. In Sep/Oct this year we had 250 mm compared to 400 mm in Sep/Oct 2010. We had rain this year in early September, a bit of a gap that gave some an opportunity to plant but then a very wet October that saw planting come to a complete halt. Things resumed again in November after conditions started to dry out, and for the most part, we got in all we needed even though a number of growers had to replant significant area. In 2010 by contrast, rain continued well into December and, at least how I remember it, many growers never got the opportunity to plant the area they wanted.

So if it wasn’t the worst in terms of rainfall, maybe the temperatures were cooler or the solar exposure was less? Well in part but not really. 2010 was generally warmer, as the graph on the right shows but solar exposure over the two key planting months, largely due to long cloudy periods, was much lower in 2010. In 2018 September was cooler and that, combined with the heavy rain in early September, forced some growers to delay planting with more rain in October forcing that even longer. The worst performing crops this year were those planted just prior to the October rains, into soils that quickly became cool. Waterlogging prevents oxygen and other gases moving through the soil pores. Low oxygen leads to poor respiration, a lack of energy and poor nutrient uptake. The seed cane sitting in cool wet ground was virtually suffocating. Luckily, later in the season we did get a break and most, if not all, of the cane planted.

Just Not Cricket

Harwood got off to a great start in the new North Coast Premier Cricket competition. They currently sit second on the table with two wins, two draws and a loss to competition leaders Sawtell. Newcomer, Harry Bird, leads the batting averages on 141.5. Captain Nathan Ensbey has made a fine start to the year, with two big centuries already and an average of 66.5. Mark Ensbey rounds out the top ten batsmen, averaging 26.25 but his most recent score of 48 suggests it’s onwards and upwards from here.

I have been under pressure from three local identities to include the cricket related photo on the right for a number of months now but had been resisting the temptation. In the spirit of Christmas giving I have finally caved in and included it. I hope it was worth the wait Phelpsy, Mossy and the Boss.

Leaders of the Pack

We had our best year in seed cane distribution for a number of years in 2018. The tough conditions did contribute with frosted seed cane blocks and re-planting creating some additional demand but, in the end, the total cane distributed was equal to the initial orders at 891 t’s of ASP cane distributed. This was our best year since 2013 when more than 1200 t was distributed. A total of 62 growers took clean seed, around 40% of the total.

Q240 (157.25 t) and Q254 (153.05 t) topped the list of seed cane distributed. Q208 was also popular with 146 t’s sold. We also saw a substantial amount of Q244 and Q252 go out but Q242 has declined. Obviously with limits on our resources we can’t always meet every need but, for the most part, we were able to satisfy most demand with the exception of Q232. As hard as we tried, we couldn’t make 175 t’s of Q232 orders go into 120t’s of available cane. We didn’t deliver any bundles this year and it looks like they are now a thing of the past with only very limited interest.
It’s an outstanding result for our little corner of the industry and, in fact, we are leading the way in terms of ASP clean seed use. In the Harwood mill area our ASP clean seed use is enough to plant around 1.6% of the total mill area. That’s almost 50% better than the next best area, Condong. All three NSW mills are in the top 5 clean seed users. All three NSW mills are in the top 5 clean seed users. That’s a real credit to Rick and the Ag Advisory Committee leadership. In the Harwood Mill area, the trail blazing work done by Dr Ant Young, who was particularly dogged in driving this change made a huge contribution to our leading position. Mark Ensby’s efforts can not be overstated either. He works tremendously hard, is flexible with his time and always tries to find a solution to make sure most needs are satisfied. Thanks also to Jacquesy for all his efforts. Top job! Most of all thank you to all the growers for taking up this challenge, in the end it’s you that makes the decision to get clean seed and you deserve the recognition.

Driven to Distraction
Santa was conducting driving tests for contract sleigh drivers at the Harwood Cricket Ground last week for those wanting to pick up a little cash in the holiday period. Dick said I had no chance so I didn’t bother having a go. He mentioned something about Santa not wanting kids to have to wait until Easter for their presents to arrive. From the picture opposite it looks like Tim McMahon didn’t make the cut either with his plans “going down the drain” so to speak. Thanks to one of my evil elves for sending through the picture (and no this hasn’t been photo-shopped).

New Rules to Handle 2,4-D Drift
The Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority recently changed the approval conditions for products containing 2,4-D. The biggest change is that all 2,4-D products must be applied with a **very coarse spray quality**. Other changes include downwind buffers, identifying temperature inversions and record keeping. For boom sprays this means using air induction spray tips. For example a blue or a red Teejet AIXR operated at 3 bar pressure produces a very coarse spray quality. There will be no problems complying if you make the switch to air induction tips if you haven’t already. Irvin legs might be a slight problem. Some have tried replacing the blue and red jets with air induction tips but have had some issues with the venturi hole on the jet blocking up with trash and dirt. It might be best to see if this was a once off problem. The other alternate is to try a Turbo Teejet, not a true air induction jet, but produces a coarse spray quality at 2 bar pressure. More information is available from a handy GRDC guide which is in the “weed control and chemical use” section on the Ag page of the Sunshine Sugar website or copy this link in your web browser:


Clean Up with Chemclear
The appropriate collection and disposal of chemicals minimises their impact on the environment if otherwise left unattended. The Chemclear service ensures these possible environmental contaminants are retrieved and in turn reduces waste and the possibility of residual contamination. Chemclear will hold a collection has been scheduled for New South Wales, commencing in March 2019 and chemical users have until 19 February to register their unwanted chemicals. Check here for more details. It’s a good opportunity to clean up the shed and get rid of chemicals you no longer need.


ASSCT Heading South (West)
Next year’s sugar conference is in Toowoomba, perhaps not the centre of the sugar industry in Australia but a lot closer for us then many other key centres. Ag Services has funds to sponsor some NSW farmers to attend the conference from 30 April to 3 May 2019. There is always something the you could pick up to improve your farming practices. Please let us know at your earliest convenience if you would like to attend. Numbers are limited so let us know asap. Go to this link for the conference program overview.


Merry Christmas from Dick & Al
It’s been a tough year for growers, with drought, frosts and too much rain at times interrupting the harvest and planting. We thank you for your patience and understanding through it all and we would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone for all their help during the year and to wish everyone a very Merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous 2019.

Cheers from Alister & Mark

**ASP Clean Seed (% Mill Area)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>ASP Clean Seed (% Mill Area)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Broadwater</td>
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<tr>
<td>Condong</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harwood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
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