2019 Season Rainfall

The forecasts for a dry summer have turned out to be true with January 2019 the driest on record and to-date February is not far behind. The few showers that have been received have kept things green but of late the crop is showing clear signs of moisture stress.

It is said that the Tweed produces the most cane in dry years but these extremely dry and hot conditions of late, during the peak growing months, will unfortunately result in yields being adversely affected. Significant and effective rainfall in the next few weeks is required to enable the cane and the soybeans to take advantage of the few remaining growing months.

Variety Report

You should have received the 2018 season Crop and Variety report via email or post. If you have not received it and want a copy, please give us a call, pick one up from the office or look on the website.

Individual crop and variety reports are also available and if you would like to make use of this information to plan your planting program for the coming season, please give me a call and we can go through the information at your convenience.

Soybean crop

As with the cane crop the lack of rain has not helped the soybeans. Generally, the crop is not looking too bad but some rain is needed to enable the plants to produce a crop worth harvesting. Regular pest inspections of your beans are advised because they are most vulnerable when stressed.

Shed Meetings

A round of three shed meetings is planned for the week beginning 18 March. If there are any specific topics you would like to discuss or want to know more about, please let us know in good time so that we can do some homework in preparation for the meetings.

Agricultural Seminar and Information Day

An information day to update growers on the current research projects being undertaken by SRA will be held on 26th March at Harwood. A bus will be organized from Condong if there are sufficient numbers of growers wishing to attend. Please let us know ASAP if you will be attending and if you want to make use of the bus. More information of the topics and speakers for the day are attached.
An Update on SRA’s activities in NSW & Rocky Point

This is a short summary of SRA’s adoption activities since mid-last year. The purpose of the SRA Industry Adoption Strategy is to support the growth of the sugar industry through application of technology and practices that lead to an increasing cane supply. Each region formed working groups to discuss and develop their own plans. In our case the NSW Ag Advisory Committee and Rocky Point Canegrowers & mill reps got together to form an advisory committee.

The group identified what the research and practice improvement needs were, and the most effective means of doing it. Each regional group also nominated two people to represent the region on the Industry wide adoption committee. This industry committee will co-ordinate the plans and try to obtain funding to commission new projects. Wayne Rodgers and Rick Beattie will represent NSW on this committee. Sebastien Garcia-Cuenca is responsible for administrative tasks and engaging with the existing groups.

Since July 2018 Sebastien prepared a regional discussion paper and the committee has agreed on 3 top priorities, improved farming systems, nutrient management and better cane varieties. The next step has been to develop the plans for review and commissioning to the industry advisory committee. This group meets in March so by July some projects on farming systems, nutrients and varieties should commence.

In parallel to the above, SRA has been co-funding and delivering with Ag. Services, and Rocky Point Canegrowers, regional projects that include:

- A nematode survey on 45 NSW farms where 15 blocks per mill area have been sampled and analysed to assess the distribution and potential impact of nematode species in different NSW soil types. The results of these will be discussed at the shed meetings.
- A winter fallow demonstration trial was established at the Sunshine Sugar corporate farm to trial different winter and multispecies crops. These results will also be discussed at the shed meetings.
- Southern Cross University (SCU) and the DPI are running fallow, multispecies and inter-cropping research trials in the three mill areas as part of a broader SRA cover cropping and soil health project. DPI and SCU are also conducting research on Nitrogen use efficiency as part of the SRA project, More profit from Nitrogen. They are looking at how much N is already in the soil, what is applied as fertiliser and what is used or lost by the crop when using urea as opposed to slow release fertilisers.
- Eight harvesting trials between NSW and Rocky Point were conducted to provide practical insight and economic data on harvesting practices; Results have been presented to the participating groups and an overall summary will be presented at the Info Day on 26 March.
- Six Easy Steps guidelines for Rocky Point. These soil-specific nutrition guidelines will allow Rocky Point growers to manage their fertiliser inputs in a more precise and cost-effective way.

Please contact Sebastien Garcia-Cuenca on 0421 349 995 or s.garcia-cuenca@sugarresearch.com.au with any queries, comments or if you require more details on any of the above topics.

**Bonsucro Audit**

The annual audit will take place during the latter half of May. When the names of the lucky winners of this years’ audit are announced they will be notified. It is a requirement of the certification that 6 farms are audited every year and eventually all farms will have to be done. We will work through the process with you and it is not something that should be avoided at all costs as it is not a big deal.

**Last word**

Hopefully we will see some decent rain over the coming weeks so that the growing season can get back on track. If you are taking advantage of the quiet time to have a break, enjoy yourselves and take care. Ged will be on leave from next week until mid-March and Malcolm will be away for April. See you in the paddocks.