

## Using the 'off-season' to get your farming equipment right for the season ahead

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*The 'off-season' – December through to April – is a great time for growers to repair and maintain farm machinery. It is also an excellent time to find out what other growers are doing, and to think about modifications to existing equipment and purchasing new equipment that might improve farming operations in the season ahead.*

### Equipment modifications and machinery decisions to consider

#### Planter

Setting up your planter with proper press-wheels will help germination and remove the need for separate pressing operations.

The ideal press-wheel ground pressure varies, depending on soil texture, tilth and soil moisture. A down pressure of 2-4 kg/cm of press-wheel width is generally best. Use the lower pressure on sandy soils.

**Right:** Good press-wheel set-up will improve germination.



#### Herbicide sprayers

Consider which herbicides you intend to use after the wet season and check that the nozzles on your rig match label recommendations.

Check nozzle performance and replace any if output is more than 10 per cent. Some growers replace the nozzle if the variation is more than 5 per cent.

Some growers have fitted dropper legs directly over the row, allowing flexibility in applying pre-emergents to rows only.

If using glyphosate through shields or hoods, check nozzle choice and set-up to make sure that there is no drift and, importantly, that there is no drip line of herbicide from the shield or hood sides.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has developed a dual herbicide spray system. This system could be useful on your farm, especially if you have problems with perennial grasses in older ratoons.

The spray leg applies knockdown herbicides such as glyphosate to the inter-row without the use of shields or hoods. It also applies residual herbicides to the cane row only.

For more information on this system, contact Allan Blair at [allan.blair@daff.qld.gov.au](mailto:allan.blair@daff.qld.gov.au)



**Above:** Dual sprayer leg. (Image courtesy of DAFF).

## Seed cane harvester

Billet quality for planting is very important for germination; high-quality billets can reduce the planting rate. Ideally, dedicated seed cane harvesters should have their roller train optimised and rollers rubber-coated to prevent damage to eyes. If you rubber-coat rollers, make sure that the roller speeds match the chopper speed. Harvesters manufactured from 2000 onwards should already have factory-set optimised rollers.

Rubber coating services are provided by Tastex Linings, 07 3271 6303.

## Hilling-up implements

Row profiles that do not match the harvester basecutter action result in increased dirt levels in cane, poor pick-up, stool shattering and poor ratooning. As well as the physical set-up of your hilling-up implement, timing is also important.

Hilling-up operations should aim to achieve:

- Consistent hill-up profile across the farm, matching the basecutter angle; avoid flat or hollow profiles.
- No volcano effect, which is caused by hilling-up after excessive shoot growth with shoots impeding the soil flow into the centre.
- Clod-free profiles as much as possible as clods increase soil in cane supply.
- A flat, smooth inter-row free of tine marks to give the harvester a level base to work on.

If you treat for one-year canegrubs, ensure that your hilling-up profile does not leave any insecticide treatment too deep, as this will reduce its effectiveness.



Above: Appropriately hilled-up cane.

## Fertiliser boxes

Double-disc openers with press-wheels behind the single coulter stool splitter allow better placement and less choke-ups from trash. The openers allow operation over a wider range of field conditions, meaning fertiliser can be applied earlier after rain.

Many growers have modified their fertiliser applicator to apply either liquid or granular imidacloprid for canegrub control. This eliminates a separate field operation and ensures that insecticide application equipment is available when you need it.

**Right:** Double-disc openers with press-wheels behind the coulter on a fertiliser applicator.



## Metering systems for liquid insecticide

Dosatron® metering systems inject liquid insecticide concentrate directly into the water supply line from the original insecticide container. The system eliminates carryover insecticide tank mixes and provides for easy rate adjustment. The system can be easily retrofitted to existing applicators or supplied fitted to new equipment.

For more information, visit the Dosatron website [www.dosatronsales.com.au](http://www.dosatronsales.com.au) or call Hodge Industries on 07 4955 0500. If you treat for one-year canegrubs, ensure that your hilling-up profile does not leave any insecticide treatment too deep, as this will reduce its effectiveness.

**Right:** The Dosatron® metering system on a billet planter.

