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Mentoring for sugar industry succession and growth

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Mentoring for sugar industry succession and growth

A research project undertaken by CANEGROWERS with funding support from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation

Final Report: October 2013
Author’s Note:

*iGrow: mentoring for sugar industry succession and growth*

A research project undertaken by CANEGROWERS with funding support from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation.

The author acknowledges the assistance of the following people in this research project and in the completion of this final report:

Debra Burden  Regional Manager, CANEGROWERS Burdekin
Jim Collins  District Manager, CANEGROWERS Burdekin
Craig Doyle  Acting Executive Manager, Cane Products
Quinton Hildebrand  CEO, Mackay Sugar
John King  CEO, Tully Sugar
Kerry Latter  CEO, CANEGROWERS Mackay
Peter Lucy  CEO, CANEGROWERS Tully
Ron Mullins  Deputy CEO, CANEGROWERS
Gerard Puglisi  Co-owner, Puglisi Farming, Mossman

The author also acknowledges the guidance provided by staff of the Sugar Research and Development Corporation, in particular Diana Saunders, Les Robertson and Ben Baldwin.

This final report was prepared by Gordana Blazevic, Blaze Consulting (Aust) Pty Ltd.

October 2013
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Executive Summary

This research project led by CANEGROWERS sought to address the lack of succession planning within the Queensland sugar industry. The project developed iGrow: mentoring for industry succession planning and growth, a model to meet the current and future leadership and business development needs of the industry by supporting sustainable individual businesses and whole of industry expansion, growth and productivity.

The project attempted to implement iGrow in three of the fastest growing regions in Queensland – Tully, Burdekin and Mackay - and evaluate its impact.

The project was inspired by and built on a pilot mentoring project, conducted in 2010 with the assistance of a grant from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, that demonstrated a willingness by young industry members to be mentored.

During 2012/13, the project experienced a number of internal and external challenges.

Timing the implementation of the project around the obligations of participants associated with the growing cycle of sugar cane was always going to be a critical factor. Anticipating the impacts of two natural disasters and unseasonal weather conditions over the two years during which the project was developed and implementation attempted, was much more difficult.

The aftermath of cyclone Yasi in February 2011 had a prolonged impact on the industry, particularly in North Queensland. The focus of growers was clearly on the very practical job of maintaining their crops and achieving the best possible yield when the time came for harvest.

In 2012, the Mackay region experienced a delayed crush again due to weather conditions.

In January 2013, Cyclone Oswald brought with it more disruptions.

In this context, and despite being implementation ready, it became difficult for this project to gain traction with industry leaders and potential participants.

In April 2013, CANEGROWERS made the difficult decision to withdraw from the project.

This final project report details the challenges and lessons learned throughout the development and attempted implementation of the project.
Purpose of the research project

The sugar industry in Queensland has the potential to increase its current annual production from 30 million tonnes to 40 million tonnes of sugar cane within the next three years. This potential is at risk of not being realised due to higher than average age of growers, lack of effective succession planning to facilitate the transition to a new generation of growers, related increasing exit of farmers from the industry and difficulty in attracting new entrants to the industry due to the high cost of entry.

A potential loss of 10 million tonnes of sugar cane to the Queensland sugar industry over the next 3 years will impact significantly on the sustainability of individual farming businesses and the industry.

This project sought to develop an effective strategy to address the issues of ageing growers who are risk averse and holding back young growers due to their lack of effective succession planning, and the number of growers who are leaving the industry or converting to other agricultural enterprises (e.g. horticulture, forestry and hobby blocks).

Attachment A outlines the business case for this project presented to the Sugar Research and Development Corporation.

Based on available local and international research, and the results of a modest pilot project, CANEGROWERS sought to develop, implement and evaluate an integrated strategy that supports sustainable individual business and whole of industry expansion, growth and productivity within the Queensland sugar industry.

Specifically, the project objectives were to:

1. develop a ‘mentoring for industry succession and growth’ model that meets the current and future needs of the Queensland sugar industry
2. successfully implement the model in the three of the fastest growing sugar regions in Queensland – Tully, Burdekin and Mackay
3. undertake a process and impact evaluation within 12 months of implementation.

With funding assistance from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation, the iGrow: mentoring for industry succession and growth model was intended to specifically target Next Gen leadership development. It was envisaged that the project would have significant economic and social benefits to the industry including building on the internal strengths of the industry; transferring institutional memory and knowledge through mentoring partnerships; and valuing those who have been in the industry for a long time and providing them with a renewed energy and motivation as they mentor the growers of the future.

With the assistance of funding from the Sugar Research and Development Corporation in 2012, CANEGROWERS assembled a project leadership team to guide the development of the project and champion the project within the regions in which it would be implemented and evaluated.

The project leadership team comprised:

Ron Mullins  
Deputy CEO, CANEGROWERS
Craig Doyle  
Acting Executive Manager, Cane Products
Quinton Hildebrand  
CEO, Mackay Sugar
John King  
CEO, Tully Sugar
Jim Collins  
District Manager, CANEGROWERS Burdekin
Kerry Latter  
CEO, CANEGROWERS Mackay
Peter Lucy  
CEO, CANEGROWERS Tully
Gordana Blazevic  
Project Research Consultant
Project background

Mentoring is used all over the world in large corporations, small business, universities and in youth development. It has also been successfully implemented in the dairy and cotton industries in Australia.

This project was inspired by and built on a pilot mentoring project, conducted in 2010 with the assistance of a grant from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, that demonstrated a willingness by young industry members to be mentored.

A review of available Australian and international literature about mentoring, with a particular focus on application within the agricultural industry, provided further guidance for the development of the iGrow: mentoring for industry succession and growth model.

Young Canegrowers Leadership Mentoring Program (2010)

CANEGROWERS received a small grant from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to pilot the mentoring concept among Next Gen growers.

This pilot project was implemented over a 4 month period with 9 participants from Mossman, Tully, Townsville and Brisbane.

An evaluation of the pilot project demonstrated that both mentees and mentors found the experience valuable.

Mentees indicated that participating in the pilot project gave them:

✓ increased confidence
✓ awareness about what I know and what I need to learn
✓ opportunities for networking and building new relationships
✓ learning from people that are some of the best in the industry
✓ knowledge transfer and learning new skills
✓ very good advice and information
✓ increased productivity and time management
✓ motivation to take more of an interest in the business.

One mentee offered the following reflection:

“I listen to my employees’ problems a lot more now. I try to give my employees more responsibility as a result of the advice given to me from my mentor. I am trying to adopt a bonus system for my employees to praise them for good work.”

These were some of the main insights offered by participating mentors:

- I gained great satisfaction in working with young people who were all passionate about doing the pilot because they wanted to do it not because they had to do it.

- The mentees keenness to learn was apparent despite the pressures of farming and harvesting in an abnormally wet season. The mentees appreciated the time given by the mentor to participate in the program.

- This mentoring program pushed me to consider other peoples’ learning styles and consider others’ capabilities in terms of the knowledge and understanding. It assisted me to build trust and rapport with individuals. Having never mentored before, I would not be so daunted if approached again to offer assistance.
When asked what they thought the likely benefits of a mentoring program were for the sugar industry, participating mentees and mentors offered the following responses:

- better business skills development
- improved relations between different levels of industry
- sharing of information particularly across generations in the sugar industry
- two-way transfer of knowledge and guidance from experienced industry people
- better understanding of the views of the next generation
- More confidence to ask questions
- Fill the gap of knowledge between older farmers and next gen farmers.

Both mentees and mentors thought that the concept of a mentoring program for the sugar industry was a good initiative and needed by the industry. They particularly identified the potential for such a strategy to ensure that the knowledge transfer between generations is maintained and enhanced for the long term benefit of individual businesses and the industry.

Participants also identified some improvements that could be made to the program:

- better if conducted during the non-harvest period
- needs to be longer to allow for relationship development between mentees and mentors
- more local mentors would facilitate greater access to face to face meetings
- mentors must have a real desire and commitment to participate
- more flexibility needs to be built into the program to allow for unforeseen circumstances that may impact on the program
- an initial workshop where all mentors and mentees could meet and ask questions about the program would be beneficial.

The overwhelming challenge for participating mentees was time management. Participants already have a full workload on the farm, and many have other paying jobs that supplement the farm’s income in addition to family responsibilities. The idea of investing time and effort into mentoring in order to improve their efficiency via knowledge and experience transfer was very appealing. Finding the time to invest in the program was extremely challenging.

**Key findings of the literature review**

Through mentoring the sugar industry has an excellent opportunity to develop its people. New challenges continually test the resilience of the farm, manufacture and service sector of the industry. The experience of others demonstrates that effective mentoring initiatives can help equip individuals to face the challenges ahead and increase their capacity to deal with change.

Mentoring is a supportive and private relationship between two people and provides the individuals involved with an opportunity to share and develop their knowledge, experience and skills. Mentors facilitate constructive reflection of actions, behaviours and learning journeys. It is not about giving advice – it is about opening up options and stimulating problem solving within a positive, solutions focused environment. Mentoring is not just short term problem solving; it has a long term strategic goal for positioning the mentee where they want to be in the future.

The majority of small business owners, by their very nature, work in their business at the exclusion of working on their business. A mentor can help a small business owner to work on their business, challenging their perceptions and helping to resolve their issues. All small businesses have issues that need to be assessed and decided on. Frequently there is nobody other than those directly in the business with whom to discuss these issues. A mentor can bring an outside and fresh perspective to the issues and aid in the decision process. They also bring clarity and help focus on the issues that matter most to business success.

Some of the general benefits of mentoring identified in the research include:
strengthening existing enterprises
- positively and proactively influencing perceptions of career success
- tapping into and utilising the experience of successful industry leaders
- offering a unique opportunity to enhance competitiveness through a carefully designed and structured program that both supports and drives business strategy
- providing a significant step forward for change at individual, group and industry levels as a well as offering a platform for alignment of third party support for improvement
- providing a vehicle for values sharing and knowledge transfer
- building confidence, enabling new thinking and moving an entrepreneur on in their development.

The impact of successful mentoring on a mentee can be profound, ranging from business gains through to personal development. A well run mentoring program can provide mentees with safe advice, a sounding board, more confidence and increased motivation. Often the main impacts of mentoring occur by the mentor opening up networks of contacts to the mentee.

While the motivation for a mentor is typically a selfless wish to make a contribution to the industry, a properly designed and managed program will ensure mentors have the opportunity to gain benefits commensurate with their contributions. Benefits to mentors can include personal development (e.g. enhanced listening skills, higher empathy, enlarged networks and community recognition).

Mentoring programs can also suffer from some common pitfalls due to the concept of mentoring being new in some industries. Mentoring programs are very time consuming and resource hungry, and can be perceived as daunting. The key success factors centre around having clear expectations for the mentoring relationship, focusing on the needs of the mentees and recruiting participants that have the right characteristics for being an effective mentee and mentor.

Mentees must have a commitment to developing your career in the industry and achieving personal growth and professional goals. They must appreciate and be open to different perspectives, and have the ability to receive constructive and honest feedback. Importantly, they must be willing to have a go and try out different things; to take risks.

Mentors must be willing to share their time, expertise and experience, and facilitate networking opportunities for their mentees through their contacts. They must be good listeners, flexible and have the ability to give constructive and honest feedback. Above all else they must have honesty and integrity, and be able to provide appropriate and timely advice.

Of particular relevance to this project, was the examination of literature relevant to the application of mentoring within the agricultural industry. Of particular relevance were Dairy Sage Mentoring and the People in Dairy program (Victoria), Australia’s Future Cotton Leaders Program (Queensland/New South Wales) and Grow Zone - Rural Business Development Corporation and the Department of Agriculture and Food (Western Australia).

The key elements of success gleaned from available literature about these programs included:

- The program must have a long term sponsor and home.
- Participant places were limited to between 4 and 15 participants. This was a function of these types of programs being resource intensive but also gave them a sense of ‘exclusivity’ as participants had to compete for a place. In one program an independent panel reviewed each potential mentees business case for entry to the program.
- The focus was on high-achievers or those with potential for leadership.

An interesting insight from West Australian Agriculture and Food Minister, Terry Redman, about the program: "Firstly if I had one criticism of the farming community it would be their lack of preparedness for self improvement," Mr Redman said. "But what Grow Zone is doing, is putting the high-achievers in agriculture alongside a mentor who will take them further with their innovation."
Participants were selected from all sectors of the industry including farming, research and development, extension and marketing.

Programs were time limited – the shortest was 3 months and the longest was 8 months.

Mentees were matched with highly experienced, inspirational and dynamic business professionals.

A structured framework for the establishment of mentoring relationships was critical. This included an introductory training workshop, a combination of joint and separate follow-up sessions for participants and broader networking functions.

Mentoring partnerships were also supported by a ‘mentoring manual’ written specifically for the industry which included workshop training notes, suggestions for partnership activities, how to communicate and how often, and tips for constructive reflection through giving and receiving feedback.

Each participant worked on their own leadership project, designed to deliver real benefits to their industry while giving them the opportunity to practice and develop their leadership skills. This was an integrated component of the majority of programs.

Participation was also supported by face-to-face forums, group teleseminars, online email discussion forums and active referral of participants to networks, individuals and groups of interest.

In summary, the experience of conducting a local pilot mentoring project and the outcomes of the literature review provided the following key guidelines for the development of the iGrow: mentoring for industry succession and growth model:

- Clear expectations for the mentoring relationship must be established from the outset.
- The program must be focused on the needs of the mentees. In the programs reviewed, places were limited to between 4 and 15 participants.
- Mentees must have a commitment to developing their career in the industry and achieving personal growth and professional goals. In the programs reviewed, mentees were recruited from already identified high-achievers.
- The program must have sufficient flexibility to fit with the farming cycle. In the programs reviewed, the longest program was of eight months duration.
- Mentors must be willing to share their time, expertise and experience, and facilitate networking opportunities for their mentees through their contacts. They must also be highly experienced, inspirational and dynamic business professionals to be able to offer these opportunities to mentees.
- A structured framework for the establishment of mentoring relationships is critical. This may include a series of initial and follow-up workshops, a mentoring manual, online support and broader networking opportunities.
- A tangible outcome from participating in the program such as a project that has value to the individual mentee and also the industry as a whole.

A summary literature review can be found at Attachment B.
Project development

The *iGrow: mentoring for industry succession and growth* research project sought to develop, implement and evaluate a model for supporting sustainable individual business and whole of industry expansion, growth and productivity.

The model was to be based on available best practice and industry feedback. Once developed, the model would be implemented in the three growth regions of Tully, Burdekin and Mackay. It was anticipated that a total of 50 matched pairs of mentees-mentors would participate in the 12 month mentoring program which would then be evaluated during the final year of the project.

The following section of this report provides an overview of the program model and stages of the project that were developed in preparation for implementation.

Program model

Program introduction

The key feature of the program is mentoring, where young participants will be teamed with a mentor who will provide support and advice in building entrepreneurial farming businesses. The program will provide an experience that helps build both the young entrepreneur and the young entrepreneur’s business.

It’s all about getting the skills, the contacts, the support and advice to make existing businesses more sustainable and resilient in a changing climate. Managing a business in the sugar industry can be challenging. With climate change, increased consumer demands, higher operational costs, and an international economic slowdown building or expanding a sustainable business requires individuals to be business savvy, financially ready and innovative.

The development of this program has been informed by the available Australian and international literature about mentoring and, in particular by mentoring programs that have been successfully implemented in the agricultural industry within the Australian context.
The program will utilise experts to deliver an integrated professional development program that covers business, financial management, sustainability, managing in a changing climate, family business planning/relationships and entrepreneurial skills.

The program will consist of professional development opportunities, networking events, discussion forums and field trips.

The program offers participants the opportunity to be proactive and develop new skills and networks so that they can plan for business success and meet the challenges of the future.

The experience of previous mentoring programs suggests that the following elements underpin program development:

- Consult before you start - roundtable discussions with potential mentees about expectations, training and support needs and preferences, with potential mentors involved in farming and those working in other sectors of the industry
- Define a start and finish date
- Sign agreements with mentees and mentors
- Conduct a formal induction
- Spend time on the matching process – a critical success factor to creating a relationship that will support learning
- Kick off with a face-to-face meeting/workshop – it’s all about building a personal relationship
- Provide regular ‘tips and tricks’ for keeping mentoring relationships on track
- Identify preferred interaction style
- Use electronic communication – it’s particularly useful if the mentee and mentor are not in the same location.

**Mentee recruitment process**

Similar programs recommend that mentee recruitment requires:

- Proactive tapping on shoulders - get local councillor, grower groups to tap potential participants on the shoulder
- Lots of energy in engaging with potential mentees
- Defining clearly ‘what's in it for me’
- Working through existing groups - get groups to get their members along
- Using media effectively - stakeholders read different things
- Developing different strategies for engaging with each target group
- Using private service providers to identify and enrol participants

Examples of key messages that may be used for mentee promotion include:

- **Time to work on your business**
  Over the first year there will be 12 days of networking, mentoring events, field trips and professional development/training from a range of experts. Through this program we want to see young entrepreneurs grow innovative, commercially and environmentally sustainable businesses.

- **Quality program delivery**
  The program will utilise the skills of academics, successful business owners, business consultants and skilled training providers. These people will be of high standard with practical experience of regional communities and their needs. The program combines structured training sessions with an element of self direction. This will ensure you can have your say on what skills you want or need to grow (i.e. marketing, business management, product development, commercialisation or other).
• **Personal and professional development opportunities**
  Throughout this program you will develop not only your entrepreneurial skills but you will also gain a whole heap of skills and contacts. Your mentor will also offer you support – this part is what you make it.

• **Regular support**
  The government and your industry are keen to invest in people who are building sustainable and productive businesses in a changing climate. During this program we will be identifying other funding opportunities and assisting our program participants to be best placed to compete for additional support that will help them make their business fly.

• **Value for money**
  There are no costs for successful participants other than a one-off $100 registration fee. You will also be responsible for getting to and from any program events (unless indicated otherwise).

A sample Mentee Expression of Interest Form can be found at Attachment C.

**Mentor recruitment process**

Research indicates the success of mentoring programs is determined by how well equipped mentors are to carry out the role.

This means that the clearer and more comprehensive the information provided to prospective mentors is, the more likely a program will attract the right type of person.

Some of the key promotional messages developed for this program included:

- Do you enjoy sharing your skills and knowledge knowing that you are assisting someone else to develop and grow?
- Are you interested in supporting others as they develop personally or professionally within the sugar industry?
- Would you like to give back to the industry that has given you so much?
- Do you work in the sugar industry and would like to share your knowledge and experience with enthusiastic young people?

- The mentoring program is for you if you have:
  - Understanding of the concept of mentorship and its requirements
  - Excellent communication skills
  - Willingness to share your knowledge, skills and experience
  - Availability
  - Ability to manage time effectively

- The mentoring program is for you if you have skills in one or more of the following areas:
  - Business/Financial management
  - Expanding through the value chain
  - Investment management/off farm diversification
  - Sustainable farming practice
  - Marketing/product development/branding
  - Managing agri-business in a changing climate
  - Succession planning

This program will include an introduction workshop including a briefing session for mentors. This intensive 4 hour session will include an overview of the program, outline roles and responsibilities and provide some tools for interacting and motivating others.
At the conclusion of the mentor briefing session, mentors will be required to participate in the remainder of the introduction workshop when the ‘mentor match’ process will be undertaken.

Mentors will also be required to support their mentees during the remainder of the program through the design of a personal development plan. This will form the blueprint for their ongoing work together.

Mentors must be prepared to participate in two days of mentor-mentee training and commit to participating in at least four face-to-face mentoring sessions with their mentee over a 12 month period. Mentors do not necessarily need to be from within the sugar industry. They can also be professionals with links to the sugar industry.

Being a mentor is a volunteer role however there are some key responsibilities:

1. Develop individual mentor plan with mentee.
2. Ensure regular contact and communication with mentee.
3. Set clear expectations and ensure availability and accessibility.
4. Encourage, motivate and inspire mentee to continue with their development.
5. Proactively share knowledge with mentee in order to ensure that there is a consistent flow of information and growth.
6. Create opportunities for mentee to enhance growth within their area of expertise.
7. Quarterly reporting of progress and areas of required support.

A sample Mentor Application Form can be found at Attachment C.

Pre-participation assessment

Prior to participating in the program, mentees will be required to complete an assessment which will provide valuable insights to mentees and enhance the mentor-mentee relationship. The tools under consideration were:

- Adult learning style preferences (Peter Honey & Alan Mumford)
- Hogan Assessment – motivators and personal derailers
- DiSC – work preferences
- Team Management Systems - work preferences

Program support though mentoring training, professional development and networking

A two-day mentee-mentor introductory workshop has been designed as the foundation for the development of the mentoring relationship.

Day 1 will focus on:

- Understanding what is mentoring
- How to make the most from mentoring partnerships
- Professional development training in areas such as goal setting, skills analysis, communication skills and understanding learning styles

This training will be delivered in joint mentee-mentor sessions aimed at providing mentees and mentors with the opportunity to get to know each other. This is expected to make the matching process more informed.

Day 1 concludes with a dinner including a speed networking segment to provide a further opportunity for participants to meet and to facilitate the self-matching process.
Day 2 facilitates the matching of mentees and mentors, and commences the process of developing a personal development plan for the mentee. Participants are asked to commit to a partnership for a minimum period of 12 months and the personal development plan acts as the blueprint for the mentoring partnership.

Some of the practical resources that have been developed to support the mentee-mentor partnership include:

- Meeting checklist
- Meeting review format
- Quarterly reporting format
- 90 day goal planner
- Business plan template
- Marketing plan template
- Small Business Diagnostic Tool
- SWOT analysis template
- Competitor analysis template

A professional development program was mapped out for the duration of the program and included the following range of suggested topics:

- Fundamentals of entrepreneurship
- Business planning
- Financial management
- Marketing and product development
- Succession planning
- Farming the future
- Field trip to successful businesses
- Time management
- Work-life balance

Options for use of tele-conferences and/or online tools to provide additional knowledge and peer support will be investigated based on the participants learning needs and preferences.

**Project communications**

Various modes of communication that would be used throughout the project to ensure regular communication with participants was also identified. They included:

- CANEGROWERS Magazine
- Mentoring webpage (on Canegrowers website)
- LinkedIn mentoring forum/blog to be maintained during the life of the project
- Mentoring eNewsletter to be distributed monthly to all participants.

**Regional project coordinators**

While the project was developed centrally, with regional input, implementation was to occur jointly with key regional staff who would be trained to provide the ongoing 'local' support for the project. The training of key regional staff was intended to ensure the sustainability of the program within key sugar regions.

The role and responsibilities of regional project coordinators were to:

1. Attend coordinator training
2. Identify potential mentors and manage the application process
3. Train selected mentors regarding mentorship and expectations
4. Implement (project manage) the mentorship program in designated area
5. Provide relevant reports (monthly and/or quarterly)
6. Communicate developments, achievements and challenges to CANEGROWERS
7. Administer fund disbursements (budget management)

Evaluation

Evaluation objectives were to:

- Evaluate the process (adherence to process) underpinning the project
- Evaluate the impact (immediate effects of the implementation of the process) of the project
- Identify critical lessons learned and success factors relevant to future project development and implementation

Baseline evaluation was to be conducted in the three target regions through an online survey. The results of the online surveys would feed into the overall formal evaluation of the program.

More detailed information about the development of the project can be found at Attachment C.
Implementation challenges and insights

Summary of key actions undertaken to progress the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23 November 2010</td>
<td>EOI for mentoring project accepted by SRDC pending preparation of full research proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 February 2011</td>
<td>Impacts of Cyclone Yasi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 June 2011</td>
<td>Research project proposal accepted by SRDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 August 2011</td>
<td>Project Leadership Team meeting held with following actions agreed:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literature review will proceed as planned – to be completed by mid 2012.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Regional workshops – rescheduled and held at a time when both potential mentors and mentees can be involved.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Next Project Leadership Team meeting via teleconference in May 2012.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 November 2012</td>
<td>Milestone Report submitted to SRDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 April 2012</td>
<td>Teleconferences with Project Leadership Team members to advise progress and secure dates for regional consultations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mackay - late May crush has delayed local action to progress project – suggested consultations be scheduled in February 2013</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Burdekin – new Regional Manager, possible collaboration with Sucrogen Graduate Program - preliminary workshop scheduled for 22 May</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Tully – regional workshop scheduled for 11 May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-16 May 2012</td>
<td>Briefing with proposed facilitator for Tully workshop.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assisted with local promotion and registrations for Tully and Burdekin workshops.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Both workshops were cancelled due to lack of registrations. Factors identified by regional managers were:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Burdekin – too busy preparing for crush due to start on 5 June, off-farm work commitments, suggested reschedule for sometime in January-March 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tully – local promotion insufficient, suggest re-engage with young growers in late September 2012.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Key questions for project team:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Why is information about the project not getting to potential participants?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How are potential participants being identified?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do potential participants understand/want to be consulted about what goes into the mentoring program given that many of them have already given feedback through the DAFF funded pilot?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Would potential participants respond better if there was a product to deliver, it was free and all they had to do was participate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Experience from the DAFF funded pilot project showed that June-December is an extremely difficult time of year to engage with potential participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>June-August 2012</td>
<td>Impacts of industry expansion activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 June 2012</td>
<td>Milestone Report submitted to SRDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 September 2012</td>
<td>Advertisements calling for Expressions of Interest from potential participants and mentors for the program placed in Canegrowers Magazine Feature article about mentoring program also in Canegrowers Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 December 2012</td>
<td>Meeting with 22 young industry growers, millers and extension held in Tully – significant enthusiasm for participation in project and local coordinating group identified. Tully Next Gen Group Facebook page established and will be used as part of the communication strategy for the mentoring program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 January 2013</td>
<td>Impacts of Tropical Cyclone Oswald.</td>
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</table>

At its inaugural meeting on 26 August 2011, the Project Leadership Team acknowledged that there would be significant implementation issues associated with this project. Some of the early observations made by the team included:

- A significant percentage of farms are being looked after by 35-40 year olds who are also doing other work to support the farm.
- The program needs to be structured but flexible.
- The program needs to be succinct and interactive.
- The program needs to be structured in a menu of modules.
- Farmers are time poor but need to be involved.
- The program needs to explore mentees perceptions of the future and build their confidence. Do they consider themselves career professionals?
- There is a development opportunity in this program for growers and millers to better understand each other’s roles.
- Regional workshops should comprise a cross-section of mentors and mentees.
- The program needs to explore the concept of moving from farmer to business owner and what this means through the development of individual plans and a process that can support their implementation.
- The focus of the program must be on individual needs – how to enable them to take over on their own.
- The focus must also be on individual future growth strategies rather than regional – if individual farmers succeed then they can influence future regional growth strategies.
In line with the experience of similar projects, it was agreed that this project would be developed in collaboration with potential participants. The information presented in the previous section of this report was developed to provide a structured starting point for input from potential participants. This consultative approach was important to ensure that the project was structured to meet the needs of mentees, that content was relevant and that the process was achievable.

The early buy-in of potential participants was a critical step in the project development process. The project was ready to move into this phase in early 2012.

During teleconferences held with Project Leadership Team members in April/May 2012, it was reported that:

- Regional consultation at this time would be extremely difficult to achieve. This was due to a very bad previous season, heavy rains in early 2012 and the now urgent need to focus on crushing.

- Informal consultation within the regions indicated that potential program participants (mentees) were interested in participating in the program however did not have the time or interest in participating in program development.

- Informal consultation within the regions also indicated that the number of participants would be difficult to recruit. A more realistic number of mentees per region would be Tully (5), Burdekin (10) and Mackay (10).

In response to this feedback, it was agreed that project development would be finalised and guided by the findings of the literature review, recruitment and matching of mentees and mentors would be rescheduled for July/August and regional workshops would be held in October.

It was also agreed to reduce the number of participants (mentees) from each region. The program will have a stronger and more sustainable foundation if numbers are more manageable and it is driven and well supported by the regions. This was also consistent with the experience of other mentoring programs.

Positive steps were taken to encourage application to participate in the project as mentees and mentors. Action taken included:

- Presentation to Tully Growers Group by the Deputy CEO, CANEGROWERS
- Advertisements and feature article in CANEGROWERS magazine
- Discussions by CANEGROWERS District Managers in the study regions
- Advertisements in the Burdekin eNewsletter

A copy of the feature article in CANEGROWERS Magazine can be found at Attachment D.
Despite these efforts, the response from potential mentees and mentors was extremely low. In April 2013, CANEGROWERS made the difficult decision to withdraw from the project.

Insights:

Uncontrolled variables, such as a series of major weather events, can have a significant impact on the timing of a project and its ultimate success.

The literature review indicated clearly that other mentoring programs were working with far more modest numbers of participants. Even when they increased numbers in subsequent years, their total number was less than the number of nominated participants for this project. The project seriously over-estimated the number of participants that could be recruited from each region.

There was a high general interest in the project but this could not be converted to expressions of interest to participate. Feedback from potential participants suggested that their time was already overcommitted. Perhaps this was the case, or perhaps the project failed to motivate them sufficiently to find the time.

The project assumed that potential participants would want to be involved in project development. This notion was abandoned based on the abovementioned potential participant feedback.

Insights from a key stakeholder survey

In order to further explore why the project encountered such seemingly insurmountable challenges and document any useful learning, a final survey was undertaken.

Project Leadership Team members and four additional Next Gen representatives were invited to respond to the survey questionnaire which can be found at Attachment E.

Of a possible 11 responses, 4 were received. A summary of the results follows.

Q: What do you think are the current top 3 issues confronting sugar cane farmers in Queensland?

Respondents identified the following issues:

- Mill Performance
- A fair deal in regard to their CSA negotiations and aftercare of CSA
- Achieving a good commercial outcome to the 2010 litigation/Sucrogen dispute
- Maintaining medium to long term profitability
- Capital required to assist younger growers into farming
- Retirement and/or succession on the farming unit
- Finance
- Farming - varieties and soil health
- Research, development and extension
- High production costs and increases arising from government policies (e.g. carbon tax, electricity, water charges)
- Environmental hurdles associated with farming adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef
- Marketing and sugar pricing transparency

Only one respondent identified succession planning are a priority issue. Another respondent indicated that in a recent regional canegrowers survey succession planning was identified by members as the third lowest priority out of nine options.

In that same survey, an issue that was important to a majority of members was:
Raise standing and ‘influence’ of industry in the local community ....
“Focus on the promotion of the sugar industry as a great opportunity to create a career by getting
the whole community involved to help advance the X District.”

Providing a mentoring program to foster industry leaders of the future and support effective
succession planning could have been a very positive step towards raising the standing and
‘influence’ of the industry in the local community.

**Q: Do you think the concept of mentoring is understood within the sugar cane industry?**

The response to this question was evenly divided.

One of the respondents clarified their answer by suggesting that the project didn’t explain sufficiently
well what mentoring is and how other agricultural industries are use mentoring. Another concurred,
suggesting that many growers would not be familiar with the concept and it is not commonly used
within the industry.

**Q: Do you think there is awareness among sugar cane farmers of the succession planning
issues confronting many farming businesses in Queensland?**

All respondents believed that there was a general awareness of succession planning issues. It was
acknowledged that being aware of an issue, and being prepared to do something about it, is quite
another matter. For example, young growers have a very high awareness of the issue however older
growers are generally reluctant to be engaged on the issue.

All respondents agreed that CANEGROWERS should play a role in addressing the issue of
succession planning. It was suggested that this should perhaps not be done within the context of a
leadership mentoring program but instead by partnering with an organisation that delivers a
specialist succession program.

**Insight:**

We knew from the literature that while the concept of mentoring is widely known as a personal and
professional development tool, its application within the agricultural industry has been limited. In
essence, we were attempting to promote a concept that potential participants were not familiar with
and which did not appear to have any application to addressing issues that were a priority for them.

Focusing on the issue of succession planning within the context of the development of a leadership
mentoring program may have further confused potential participants. Was it a mentoring program to
support succession planning, or was it a mentoring program to support industry leadership
development, or was it both?

Potential mentors who may have had excellent industry knowledge and experience to share with
young growers, may have also been among those in the industry reluctant to discuss succession
planning. This may have also made them reluctant to participate in the mentoring research project.

The project experienced difficulty in engaging with potential participants (mentors and mentees).
Several strategies were attempted:

**Q: Regional workshops – they kept being postponed. Advertising was placed several times in
the CANEGROWER magazine – there was little response? Why do you think we couldn’t get
traction at this level?**

Respondents identified the following factors:
- Growers had higher priorities.
- The difficulty in explaining exactly what mentoring is and how it could work.
- The project was being undertaken during a period of unstable weather (record rainfall, cyclones and floods).
- The industry had embarked on an expansion program sparked by high world sugar prices therefore many growers were planting additional areas to take advantage of these high prices. The target audience (young growers) are the ones who are also driving the expansion of the industry’s productive capacity having a larger appetite for debt and increasing the size of the family enterprise.
- Generally, if growers are not tapped on the shoulder they are not forthcoming especially if they are not aware of or familiar with what is being offered.

**Insight:**

The impacts of several unforeseen weather events on the timing of planting and harvesting in all three regions could not have been factored into the timeframe for this project. Several attempts were made to adjust the timeframe and activities to work around these factors. Understandably, for potential participants the focus was very much on getting the best yield they could under difficult conditions.

With the benefit of hindsight, advertising a program based on a concept that potential participants were not sufficiently familiar with, and in the context of other pressing priorities, was not going to work. Similarly, trying to engage potential participants in the development of the program through regional workshops was of no interest to them.

We know from experience that ‘tapping people on the shoulder’ to ensure that they are aware of and take advantage of business development opportunities is not unusual. Given that we were charting relatively unfamiliar territory, this method of recruitment may have been more successful in bringing together a smaller group to participate in the research project.

**Q: Do you think that the development of a leadership mentoring program for the sugar industry should be tried again?**

The majority of respondents remained positive about the development of a mentoring program for the sugar industry. One respondent suggested that there is a need for a whole of industry leadership mentoring program.

Respondents offered the following suggestions for a future program:

- The timing needs to be right.
- Participation in the program needs to be fully funded.
- The focus of the program should be clearly on leadership development.
- The benefits of mentoring to addressing the basic practical issues faced by potential participants needs to be promoted better in order to demonstrate its value and develop understanding of the concept. This could be done by using relevant examples from other agricultural mentoring programs.
- In order for the program to have regional relevance, and respond to regional differences, CANEGROWERS District Managers would need to give the program a higher priority.
Summary of key learning and recommendations

Summary of key learning

This project was attempted during a period of unstable weather including record rainfall, cyclones and floods. The impact of this factor on key stakeholder and potential participant interest in the project cannot be dismissed. Having said that, there are other factors that may have also impacted the project even if weather conditions had not been so disruptive and these also cannot be dismissed. They include:

- There was a high general interest in the project but this could not be converted to expressions of interest to participate. Feedback from potential participants suggested that their time was already overcommitted. Perhaps this was the case, or perhaps the project failed to motivate them sufficiently to find the time.

- We knew from the literature that while the concept of mentoring is widely known as a personal and professional development tool, its application within the agricultural industry has been limited. In essence, we were attempting to promote a concept that potential participants were not familiar with and which did not appear to have any relevance to addressing issues that were a priority for them.

- Focusing on the issue of succession planning within the context of the development of a leadership mentoring program may have further confused potential participants. Was it a mentoring program to support succession planning, or was it a mentoring program to support industry leadership development, or was it both? The lack of clarity may have also contributed to lack of success in converting interest to participation.

- Potential mentors who may have had excellent industry knowledge and experience to share with young growers, may have also been among those in the industry reluctant to discuss succession planning. This may have also made them reluctant to participate in the mentoring research project.

- The project seriously over-estimated the number of participants that could be recruited from each region. The literature review indicated clearly that other mentoring programs were working with far more modest numbers of participants. Even when they increased numbers in subsequent years, their total number was less than the number of nominated participants for this project.

- We know from experience that ‘tapping people on the shoulder’ to ensure that they are aware of and take advantage of business development opportunities is not unusual. Given that we were charting relatively unfamiliar territory, this method of recruitment may have been more successful in bringing together a smaller group to participate in the research project.

Recommendations

The majority of respondents remained positive about the development of a mentoring program for the sugar industry. One respondent suggested that there is a need for a whole of industry leadership mentoring program.

If a future funding opportunity arose for the development of a leadership mentoring program for the sugar industry, the experience of this project would provide a strong foundation for moving quickly into regional implementation.

As indicated by key stakeholders of this project:

- The timing needs to be right.

- Participation in the program needs to be fully funded.

- The focus of the program should be clearly on leadership development.
- The benefits of mentoring to addressing the basic practical issues faced by potential participants needs to be promoted better in order to demonstrate its value and develop understanding of the concept. This could be done by using relevant examples from other agricultural mentoring programs.

- In order for the program to have regional relevance, and respond to regional differences, CANEGROWERS District Managers would need to give the program a higher priority.

- END -
Mentoring
for industry succession and growth

A presentation to the
Sugar Resource Development Corporation
Industry overview –
Australian production decline
The outcome of a decade of farm restructuring

- Growers -43%
- Area -20%
- Av production +40%
- Diversification +20% of farm income
- Changes to agricultural profile
  - Climate
  - Corporatisation
  - Diversification
Stabilised income projections – less risk at entry
Industry overview

Summary

- There is a significant decline in Australian sugar production.

- A decade of farm restructuring has resulted in fewer farmers but more tonnage per farm.

- As a result of industry deregulation, farm incomes have stabilised and there is less risk for new entrants.

How can we maximise this opportunity?
Project aims and objectives

Project aim:

To develop, implement and evaluate an integrated strategy that supports sustainable individual business and whole of industry expansion, growth and productivity.

Project objectives:

1. To develop a ‘mentoring for industry succession and growth’ model that meets the current and future needs of the Queensland sugar industry.

2. To successfully implement the model in the three of the fastest growing sugar regions in Queensland.

3. To undertake a process and impact evaluation within 12 months of implementation.
Intended outcomes of the project

- Increased regional productivity and sustainable growth.

- Better succession planning.

- Increased capacity building through the identification and development of the key skills that are required for strong industry leadership into the future.

- Exposing mentees to other agricultural industries, and also industries operating outside their district, in order to open their minds to different ways of doing business.

- Designing a program to meet the needs of growers not fitting growers into a ‘one size fits all’ model.

- Exploring different models of farming that don’t require land ownership (e.g. leasing, share farming) to support the entry of young growers who can’t finance their way into land ownership.
Alignment with industry goals

- A growth industry, successfully competing in the world market, through profitable businesses
- Successful diversification into related sugar cane products, using world class research and development
- Global leaders in environmental sustainability
- Dynamic and cooperative industry leadership

Australian Sugar Industry Alliance, Strategic Directions Document, June 2010
Why mentoring?

Mentoring is used all over the world in large corporations, small business, universities and in youth development.

In farming, mentoring is an effective way for sharing experiences and transferring farming skills from one generation to the next. Mentees learn and develop both their farming and personal life. Mentors add value to their industry, business and personal lives.

Mentoring can be the cheapest, easiest, most effective and most fulfilling means of ‘closing the gap’ in the succession planning process.

Mentoring lets those who have been in the industry for a long time, know that they are valued. It can provide a spark of renewed energy and motivation as they mentor the farmers of the future. It tells them that what they have accomplished in their own business and in the industry is important, meaningful and worth remembering.
Mentoring to raise confidence in the future of the sugar industry
Mentoring to support entry into the industry and address the decline in harvestable area
Methodology

Year 1

- Establish a project leadership reference group representing key industry stakeholders.

- Review the literature on the application and success of mentoring as a leadership development strategy, particularly in the context of agricultural industry development and more specifically the sugar industry.

- Undertake industry consultation to document and assess current strategies (including mentoring) used to facilitate transitional management arrangements within farming businesses; the factors that drive or inhibit the use of mentoring; and current strategies (including mentoring) used to encourage and actively support leadership development within the Queensland sugar industry.

- Develop a ‘mentoring for industry succession and growth’ model based on available best practice and industry feedback that builds on the driving factors and addresses the inhibiting factors.
Methodology

Year 2

- Implement the ‘mentoring for industry succession and growth’ model.

- Participation of mentors and mentees from the three growth regions:
  - Tully (10 + 10)
  - Burdekin (30 + 30)
  - Mackay (30 + 30)
Methodology

Year 3

- Conduct process and impact evaluation of the ‘mentoring for industry succession and growth’ model, through surveys of mentors and mentees, specifically examining changes in:
  - business practices
  - farming practices
  - overall decision-making
  - problem-solving

that can be linked to participation in the mentoring program.
iGrow: mentoring for industry succession and growth

Summary Literature Review

Through mentoring the sugar industry has an excellent opportunity to develop its people. New challenges continually test the resilience of the farm, manufacture and service sector of the industry and effective mentoring initiatives can help equip individuals to face the challenges ahead and increase their capacity to deal with change.

The following information is a summary of the key insights gained from a review of contemporary literature and academic research into mentoring.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is one of the oldest forms of human development and can be traced back to the ancient Greeks when Odysseus the king of Ithaca left his family to fight in the Trojan War. Before leaving he asked his old and trusted friend, Mentor to raise his son. ‘Mentor’ became a father figure, teacher, role model, trusted advisor and counsellor. Today, the concept of mentoring is used all over the world in large corporations, small business, universities and youth development. A mentor is someone who can act as a sounding board for ideas and plans.

Mentoring is a supportive and private relationship between two people and provides the individuals involved with an opportunity to share and develop their knowledge, experience and skills. Mentors facilitate constructive reflection of actions, behaviours and learning journeys.

Mentoring is a proven human development tool and there are many benefits to the mentor and mentee.

Mentoring can be a used for many situations; to navigate a business through a difficult situation, a tool in wealth strategy, grow the farm business, determining life or business goals or career advancement.

Mentoring is not about giving advice – it is about opening options and stimulating problem solving within a positive, solutions focused environment. Mentoring is not just short term problem solving. It has a long term strategic goal for positioning the mentee where they want to be in the future.

The majority of small businesses, by their very nature, work in their business at the exclusion of working on their business. A mentor can help someone work on their business by challenging perceptions and helping to resolve issues.

All small businesses have issues that need to be assessed and decided on. Frequently there is nobody other than those directly in the business with whom to discuss these issues. A mentor can bring an outside and fresh perspective to the issues and aid in the decision process. They also bring clarity and help to focus on the issues that matter.

Benefits of mentoring

Some of the general benefits of mentoring identified in the research include:

- strengthening existing enterprises
- positively and proactively influencing mentees’ perceptions of career success
- tapping into and utilising the experience of successful industry leaders
- offering a unique opportunity to enhance competitiveness through a carefully designed and structured program that both supports and drives business strategy
providing a significant step forward for change at individual, group and industry levels as well as offering a platform for alignment of third party support for improvement
providing a vehicle for values sharing and knowledge transfer
building confidence, enabling new thinking and moving an entrepreneur on in their development.

Benefits for the mentee

The impact of successful mentoring on a mentee can be profound, ranging from business gains through to personal development. A well run mentoring program can provide mentees with safe advice, a sounding board, more confidence and increased motivation. Often the main impacts of mentoring occur by the mentor opening up networks of contacts to the mentee. This added richness in networks can strengthen the overall sugar community as well as providing the following benefits at the individual level:

✓ having a sounding board
✓ getting a fresh look at what you are doing from someone outside of your business
✓ helping to advance yourself within the industry
✓ helping you to plan a path towards your goals
✓ challenging your business
✓ upskilling knowledge & practical experience
✓ learning from other people’s mistakes - benefit from the experience of your mentor
✓ widening your network - develop new networks - develop visibility within or outside of the industry
✓ personal development - develop listening skills, build self-awareness, build your confidence
✓ continuing your professional growth - demonstrate strengths and explore potential - be challenged to use talents and share expertise.

Benefits for the mentor

While the motivation for a mentor is typically a selfless wish to make a contribution to the industry, a properly designed and managed program will ensure mentors have the opportunity to gain benefits commensurate with their contributions. Benefits to mentors can include personal development (e.g. enhanced listening skills, higher empathy), expanded networks and community recognition.

Others may include:

✓ satisfaction of assisting others to grow their business - demonstrate expertise and share knowledge - satisfaction from contributing to the mentee’s development
✓ greater understanding of the barriers experienced by others in the industry
✓ developing skills and knowledge - coaching, counselling, listening and modelling
✓ developing and practising a more personal style of leadership
✓ learning new perspectives and approaches - engage in challenging discussions with people who have fresh perspectives
✓ opportunity to share knowledge, experience and skills
✓ contribute to the industry - opportunity to reflect upon the industry, renew enthusiasm for the industry.

Pitfalls of mentoring

The available literature about mentoring programs identifies the following potential pitfalls:

- programs are reasonably costly set up
- programs are very time consuming and resource hungry
- mentoring can sound a bit daunting to potential participants, particularly as it is a fairly new concept in farming
- it might be perceived as a bit too serious
- demand may be low
- establishment of unrealistic (or unspoken) expectations by the mentor or the mentee
- the mentor exerting too much control and smothering the mentee with attention
- the mentor paying too little attention to the mentee (e.g. not providing adequate, or any, feedback to the mentee)
- time management - time constraints on both sides should be acknowledged and then managed effectively
- confidentiality - both the mentor and the mentee must respect the confidentiality of certain information shared.

**Key program success factors**

- Clear expectations of the mentoring relationship
- Focus on the needs of the mentee
- Effective time management
- Good listening skills
- Openness to new ideas, suggestions and feedback
- Consistent follow-through

**Characteristics of an effective mentor**

- Willingness to share time with the mentee
- Desire to share expertise and experience
- Ability to assist the mentee in their decision-making processes by listening, sharing and reviewing options
- Openness to different perspectives
- Willingness to facilitate networking opportunities through their contacts
- Excitement and interest in the mentee’s work
- Ability to give and receive constructive and honest feedback
- Accessible and positive disposition
- Honesty and integrity
- Easy to communicate with
- Encourages the exploration of ideas
- Ability to provide appropriate and timely advice
- Flexibility in terms of expectations
- Sensibility and patience
- Up-to-date knowledge
- Ability to pick up on strengths and weaknesses of the mentee
- Ability to articulate what needs development and to suggest ways of achieving this

**Characteristics of an effective mentee**

- Commitment to developing their career in the industry
- Desire to achieve personal growth and professional goals
- Appreciating and being open to different perspectives
- Willingness to share time with their mentor
- Ability to receive and to give constructive and honest feedback
- Respect for confidences
- Being accessible and positive
- Willingness to have a go and try out different things
- Ability to take risks
- Initiative and independence
- Willingness to work
- Good organisational skills
- Good sense of self and personal capabilities
- Experience and passion
Case studies

The following examples of Australian agricultural mentoring programs were examined:

- Dairy Sage Mentoring and the People in Dairy program (Victoria)
- Grow Zone - Rural Business Development Corporation and the Department of Agriculture and Food (Western Australia)
- Australia’s Future Cotton Leaders Program (Queensland/New South Wales)
- Rural Mentor programme (New Zealand)
- Agricultural Business Mentoring (United Kingdom)

DairySage Mentoring

The DairySage mentoring project began in 2007, managed by WestVic Dairy in conjunction with Dairy Australia’s The People in Dairy program and sponsored by the Geoffrey Gardiner Dairy Foundation. DairySage is an initiative that connects mentors and mentees regionally in the dairy industry, and is designed to encourage relevant dairy industry organisations to embrace mentoring on a long term basis.

Two pilots were run, the first in Melbourne and a follow up pilot in Western Victoria. Each pilot was fully allocated with ten or more pairs.

A positive evaluation of the pilots resulted in WestVic Dairy initiating a two year project to increase the capacity of 30 mentees and strengthening the Victorian dairy industry’s network. A project team formed in October 2010 to deliver three DairySage mentoring programs in Victoria and build a legacy for ongoing programs at the end of the current Gardiner Foundation (GGF) funding.

The project aimed to provide the Australian dairy industry with a sustainable framework to establish mentoring relationships by partnering experienced, inspirational and dynamic mentors with dairying people from all sectors of the industry including the farm, manufacturing and service sectors.

DairySage Mentoring conducted six introduction training workshops throughout Victoria over three years. These workshops were designed to provide participants, both mentors and mentees, with the necessary skills to set them up for successful mentoring partnerships.

Workshops include a combination of joint and separate sessions for the participants, a networking function, dairy industry dinner and the matching of mentoring partnerships.

Partnerships are supported by a ‘mentoring manual’ written specifically for the dairy industry which includes workshop training notes and also suggestions for partnership activities, how to communicate and how often, and tips for constructive reflection through giving and receiving feedback.

During 2011 programs were run in Gippsland, South West Victoria and North East Victoria. DairyTas also approved funds to allow a small number of dairy farmers - 4 mentors and mentees - to participate in the Dairy Sage Mentoring project.

In 2012, the DairySage Mentoring Program was also being delivered by the Young Dairy Network (Qld) and commenced a program in Marburg.

Grow Zone

The Grow Zone Mentoring Project, co-ordinated by the Rural Business Development Corporation, matches high achievers in the rural sector aiming to broaden their skills with business leaders.
The three-month program offers an opportunity for the participants to build their expertise and knowledge with mentoring support from highly experienced business professionals. An independent review panel reviewed each mentee’s business case.

The program was first trialled in 2009 involving four mentees, each matched with a business leader, or mentor. The process and concepts continued to be tested. In 2011 there were 10 new participants in the program. A further 10 participants completed the program in 2012.

The focus for the program is now shifting towards fine tuning procedures, establishing a long-term sponsor and home for the program.

The Grow Zone Program has been recognised for encouraging business innovation, creativity and excellence, for the ultimate benefit of Western Australian agriculture and food industries, and helping develop closer and mutually beneficial ties between metropolitan and rural businesses.

An interesting insight from the Agriculture and Food Minister Terry Redman about the program:

"Firstly if I had one criticism of the farming community it would be their lack of preparedness for self improvement," Mr Redman said. "But what Grow Zone is doing, is putting the high-achievers in agriculture alongside a mentor who will take them further with their innovation."

**Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program**

The Australian Future Cotton Leaders Program was an initiative of Cotton Australia and is delivered in partnership with the Cotton Research and Development Corporation, and is facilitated by RuralScope Pty Limited.

The key aim of this program is to identify, develop and support emerging leaders to engage and integrate with the industry now, resulting in improved future leadership succession.

Its flagship is the integrated leadership project which is undertaken by each participant and supported by the program, facilitation process and the linking of participants with an established leader via the MentorMatch stage of the program.

Key program elements include face-to-face forums, individual integrated industry leadership project, group teleseminars, one-on-one sessions with facilitator, MentorMatch, online email discussion forum and grains industry engagement including active referral of participants to networks, individuals and groups of interest.

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Sample: Mentee Expression of Interest Form

**Personal Details**
Name
Address
Phone
Mobile
Email

**Professional Details**
Current Position
Employer/Company
Location

**Outline of employment history**

**Aims of participating in program**

**How do you think a mentor best assist in achieving these aims?**

**Areas of personal or professional development you would like to focus on**

**Current level of involvement in the sugar industry – boards, committees, professional development, short course participation**

**Suggestions for potential mentors**

**Commitment**

If selected, I agree to participate in the mentoring program for a minimum period of 12 months and to fulfil the role of ‘mentee’ as outlined below:

1. Attendance and active participation at introduction workshop.
2. Maintain regular contact with my mentor as agreed in mentor agreement.
3. Identify my goals and objectives and work with my mentor to develop a personal action plan.
4. Review my progress with my mentor.
5. Ensure confidentiality of matters discussed and information provided through the mentor relationship.
6. Provide feedback to the program co-ordinator and trainers.
7. Consent to my personal information being used for the purpose of matching mentors and to the use of photographs for the purpose of marketing and promotion of the program.
Sample: Mentor Application Form

**Personal Details**
Name
Address
Phone
Mobile
Email

**Professional Details**
Current Position
Employer/Company
Location
Qualifications

**Outline of employment history**

**Previous mentoring experience as a mentor or being mentored**

**Aim of participating in program**

**Qualities/skills that will be contributed to a mentoring partnership**

**Current level of involvement in the sugar industry – board, committee, etc.**

**Outcomes expected from the mentoring partnership**

**Commitment**

If selected, I agree to participate in the program for a minimum period of 12 months and to fulfill the role of ‘mentor’ as outlined below:

1. Attendance and active participation in introduction workshop.

2. Maintain regular contact with my mentee as agreed in mentor agreement.

3. Provide a confidential source of advice, support and guidance to the mentee, including assistance in implementing their personal development plan.

4. Review mentee progress and provide feedback, encouragement and support.

5. Provide feedback to the program co-ordinator and trainers.

6. Consent for my personal information being used for the purpose of matching participants and marketing the program.
Sample: Program mentor-mentee introductory training

Day 1

- Skill of mentoring
- How to make the most from mentoring partnerships
- Professional development training in areas such as goal setting, skills analysis, communication skills and understanding behavioural styles

Suggested format

Mentees only:
- Welcome and introductions
- About the project and how the mentoring program works
- Expectations
- Your preferred future
- Vision
- The need for change
- Current reality
- Skills needs analysis
- SWOT: building your strengths and weaknesses

Concurrent session with mentors:
- Welcome and introductions
- About the project
- How the mentoring program works
- What is mentoring
- Critical success factors to mentoring
- Interacting with mentees at an appropriate time
- Action planning
- Preparing to meet the mentors
- Skill/Will matrix
- Motivating others
- Structuring a mentoring session
- Prepare for meeting the mentees

Networking dinner
- Speed networking to provide participants with an opportunity to meet potential mentors and self-match.

Day 2

Mentors and mentees are then matched and set-up to implement and achieve a personal development plan for the mentee. Participants are asked to commit to a partnership for a minimum period of 12 months and the personal development plan acts as the blueprint for the mentoring partnership.

- Match mentors and mentees
- Communication skills
- Preferences for communication (DiSC)
- Goal setting
- Scoping the options and setting some targets
- Personal development plans
- Individual contracts with mentors
- Review process and commitments
Professional development program

Possible topics:

**Fundamentals of entrepreneurship**
Establish entrepreneurial thinking, define your business growth vision and design a profitable business model.

**Business planning**
Through this series of sessions individuals will work on developing a tailored plan for their business including risks, budgets, business goals, strategies for growth, etc.

**Financial management**
Sugar pricing, gross margins, sensitivity analysis, budgeting, development budgets, cost effectiveness of taking on new opportunities, risk management, benchmarking, monitoring financials.

**Marketing and product development**
Market research, brand development and market validation.

**Succession planning**
Understanding succession planning and how it affects farm business, understanding process of managing, planning, developing and implementing a succession plan to ensure a successful distribution of an estate within a family agricultural business context; how to communicate ideas and information to family members; legal implications.

**Farming the future**
Planning for success, how focusing on future sustainability can reduce costs and help capitalise on new opportunities.

**Field trip to successful businesses**
Over 2 days this session will bring together all participants to network and visit successful businesses, hear from experts on how they took the steps to finance, manage and grow their business.

**Time management**

**Work-life balance**

Practical resources required

- Meeting checklist
- Meeting review format
- Quarterly reporting format
- 90 day goal planner
- Business plan template
- Marketing plan template
- Small Business Diagnostic Tool
- SWOT analysis template
- Competitor analysis template

Options for use of tele-conferences and/or online tools to provide additional knowledge and peer support will be investigated based on the participants learning needs and preferences.
Project communications
- Mentoring webpage (on Canegrowers website)
- LinkedIn mentoring forum/blog will be maintained during the life of the project
- Mentoring eNewsletter will be distributed to all participants

Regional coordinator responsibilities
1. Attend coordinator training
2. Identify potential mentors and manage the application process
3. Train selected mentors regarding mentorship and expectations
4. Implement (project manage) mentorship program in designated area
5. Provide relevant reports (monthly and or quarterly)
6. Communicate developments, achievements and challenges to Canegrowers
7. Administration of fund disbursements (budget management)

Evaluation
Evaluation objectives:
- Evaluate the process (adherence to process) underpinning the project
- Evaluate the impact (immediate effects of the implementation of the process) of the project
- Identify critical lessons learned and success factors relevant to future project development and implementation

Several evaluation strategies will be used to measure the success of the project. These will include:
- Participants will be requested to evaluate their involvement in the mentoring program.
- Mentors will be asked to assess their involvement in the project, in terms of change by the mentee.
- The level of interest within the industry
- Positive feedback from participants
- Established long-term relationships

Baseline evaluation will be conducted in the three target regions through an online survey. The results of the online surveys will feed into the formal evaluation of the program.
Mentoring for industry succession and growth – it’s all about you

By CANEGROWERS
Chief Operating Officer Ron Mullins

CANEGROWERS is partnering with the Sugar Research and Development Corporation (SRDC) in an exciting initiative that will help position our new generation of growers to benefit from expected industry growth over the coming years. iGrow, the mentoring for industry succession and growth model, will be implemented and evaluated in three of the fastest growing regions in Queensland over the next 18 months.

We want our growers to be the best they can be, so that our industry is the best it can be. To achieve this, we need to ensure that they are well positioned to take up the growth and expansion opportunities that will be part of our industry’s future.

iGrow is designed to support growers personally, and in their business. The mentoring model will specifically target next generation leadership development, succession planning and effective knowledge management within individual businesses and the industry as a whole.

Mentoring is proving a success in the agricultural industry throughout Australia and overseas. Australia’s dairy, cotton and grain industries are already reaping the benefits of implementing their programs. Rural Business Development Corporation Chairman, Rob Sands, said programs such as the Future Cotton Leaders Program allows highly motivated business owners in the rural sector to capitalise on future business opportunities, and to forge promising careers in their industries.

In farming, mentoring is an effective way for sharing experiences and transferring farming skills from one generation to the next. Mentees learn and develop both their farming and personal life. Mentors add value to their industry, business and personal lives.

We have developed the iGrow model based on available best practice in Australia, overseas and from the experience of similar programs already operating within agriculture.

A practical program designed to fit with the needs of our industry, iGrow will comprise of a traditional mentoring relationship between mentors and mentees, supported by professional development workshops, webinars, access to web-based resources and an online forum.

In the coming few months we will be undertaking a process of recruitment to the twelve-month program. We will be seeking expressions of interest from industry participants who are serious about growing their business and taking advantage of the best possible advice and support that we can provide to help them achieve their business and personal goals.

We will also be seeking expressions of interest from our most experienced industry participants and asking them to share their knowledge, experience and skills to assist the development of the next generation of growers and the future growth of the industry.

iGrow is for you if you are interested in:
- Increased productivity and sustainable business growth.
- Developing your business skills or those of others in our industry.
- Opening your mind to different ways of doing business.
- Exploring different models of farming.
- Contributing to the future leadership of the industry.

For more information, look for your next edition of this magazine or contact me ron_mullins@canegrowers.com.au, phone 07 3864 6470 or 0417 790 156.
iGrow: Final report survey

Background

In 2009, Canegrowers received a small grant from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to pilot the mentoring concept among Next Gen growers. Feedback indicated:

- an acknowledgement of the value of mentoring
- a willingness to be mentored by experienced industry participants
- the importance of matching the needs of the mentee with the skills of the mentor
- the need to develop a program that has sufficient flexibility to fit with the farming cycle.

In 2011, Canegrowers was awarded a research grant by the SRDC to initiate a project to assist in addressing a number of issues impacting on the Queensland sugar cane industry:

- higher than average age of farmers – a large percentage of farms are being managed by 35-40 year olds who are also doing other work to support the farm
- lack of effective succession planning to facilitate the transition to a new generation of farmers
- related increasing exit of farmers from the industry
- difficulty in attracting new entrants to the industry due to the high cost of entry

This project sought to address the issues of:

- ageing growers who are risk averse and holding back young growers due to their lack of effective succession planning
- the number of growers who are leaving the industry or converting to other agricultural enterprises (horticulture, forestry and hobby blocks)

through the development of an integrated mentoring strategy specifically targeting next generation leadership development.

Since its inception, the project has experienced a number of internal and external challenges. Despite being implementation ready, it became more and more difficult for this project to gain traction with industry leaders and potential participants. In April 2013, Canegrowers made the difficult decision to withdraw from the project.

A final project report is being prepared which will detail the challenges and lessons learned from this project.

This survey forms part of the information gathering required to complete this report.

Survey questions

About the sugar industry in general

1. What do you think are the current top 3 issues confronting sugar cane farmers in Queensland?

2. If we asked farmers the same question, would their answer be the same? Yes/No

3. If your answer to Q2 was ‘no’, based on your experience, what would be the top 3 issues they would identify?
About this project

This project sought to use mentoring as a vehicle for developing the leadership capacity of young farmers and, in this context, address the issue of succession planning. Mentoring is used all over the world and is already used within other agricultural industries in Australia – dairy, cotton and beef.

4. Do you think the concept of mentoring is understood within the sugar cane industry? Yes/No

5. If your answer to Q4 was ‘no’, why?

The project experienced difficulty in engaging with potential participants (mentors and mentees). Several strategies were attempted:

6. Regional workshops – they kept being postponed. Why do you think we couldn’t get traction at this level?

7. Advertising – an editorial and several advertisements were placed in the Canegrower magazine. There was little response. Why do you think cane farmers didn’t respond?

About mentoring

8. Do you think Canegrowers should attempt to develop a leadership mentoring program again? Yes/No

9. If your answer to Q10 is ‘no’, why?

10. If your answer to Q10 is ‘yes’, do you have any ideas about how it could be done differently?

About succession planning

11. Do you think there is awareness among sugar cane farmers of the succession planning issue confronting many farming businesses in Queensland? Yes/No

12. If your answer to Q13 was ‘no’, why?

13. Do you think Canegrowers has a role in addressing the succession planning issue that is impacting on the industry? Yes/No

14. If your answer to Q15 is ‘no’, why?

15. If your answer to Q15 is ‘yes’, what do you think Canegrowers should do to address this issue?

Questions for Project Leadership Team Members Only

16. As a member of the project leadership team, what steps did you take to support and progress the project?

17. Do you think the project leadership team could have ‘championed’ this project to a greater extent?

18. If your answer to Q19 is ‘yes’, how?

General comments about the project: