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New longer residual canegrub control to benefit industry

Sugarcane growers dealing with canegrubs have a new tool at their disposal thanks to a long-term collaborative partnership between SRA and Crop Care Australia (CCA). By Brad Pfeffer

The chemical is a new formulation of suSCon called suSCon Maxi Intel®, which is a controlled release formulation of the active ingredient imidacloprid. The imidacloprid is released from granules over a number of years at levels toxic to canegrubs, while minimising the active ingredient loading in the soil at any time.

SRA Manager for Plant Health, Dr Andrew Ward, said the new formulation has a number of significant benefits over previous formulations, including a much longer residual.

“This is a significant project outcome following a long period of investment and it highlights SRA’s ability to form commercial relationships that lead to positive outcomes for the industry,” Dr Ward said.

The partnership sees SRA contribute with technical trialling capability including an understanding of canegrub biology and ecology, and the sugarcane farming system, with CCA managing the commercial release including formulation, marketing, and registration.

According to CCA, the product provides up to four-year control of canegrubs, dependent on species, which reduces growers’ labour, maintains higher cane-plant numbers, improves vigour and yield, and allows for stronger ratoons, as well as having potentially lower off-farm loss of the active ingredient.

Giru district grower Gary Lyons has SRA and CCA trials at his property, and he said that controlled-release canegrub control was vital for his farming business. He said that both the impact of grubs, and the value of treatment, could not be underestimated. He has been using the predecessor formulation of suSCon Maxi Intel®.

“We’ve always had canegrubs and we know that you don’t get rid of their numbers in one or two years, and that every time we plant we need to use suSCon otherwise the numbers build in the soil,” he said.

He estimated that while the losses from canegrubs could be in the order of 30 percent if untreated, the ripple effect was of course much higher as the impact carried through to future crops.

“If you have never had anything to do with grubs it may just look like a dry area in your paddock. And then the harvester goes through and the whole stool ends up in the bin, including dirt which brings your quality down. And then next year there is a big hole there and you wonder what is wrong when the harvester goes through a wet spot and makes a mess. It’s not salt or anything else – it is canegrubs.”

Mr Lyons farms about 230 ha under cane and he added that he was continuing to learn about use of chemical control. “The last time we planted we put the control further down the drill than we had ever before. We always thought it was poor soil, but it is pretty much the line of where I stopped putting suSCon on.”

SRA Development Officer Phil Ross said that imidacloprid was a vital chemical for the industry for canegrub control and that it needed to be used according to the label, with industry continuing to minimise runoff into waterways. “Growers should only treat blocks where canegrubs are a problem or are likely to become a problem,” Mr Ross said. “Do not blanket apply across the whole farm unless your advisor agrees it is necessary due to canegrub risk.”

For more information about SRA’s work on canegrub control contact Dr Andrew Ward award@sugarresearch.com.au.

SRA, CANEGROWERS, and Mackay Area Productivity Services have developed several fact sheets on maximising canegrub control and minimising off-farm chemical loss, as well as information about pesticide thresholds in waterways, which can be accessed by emailing Phil Ross on pross@sugarresearch.com.au.