

Growing a legume fallow crop of peanuts has delivered positive results to his cane for Mulgrave grower Andrew Greenwood.

Rotation crop delivers boost for Mulgrave grower

Even more than two-and-a-half years into a crop cycle, Andrew Greenwood still continues to see visual benefits to his sugarcane following a rotation crop of peanuts, as SRA's Brad Pfeffer discovers.

Mulgrave region grower Andrew Greenwood believes one of the key aspects of improvement with farming is continuing to try new things.

With this approach in mind, he has employed a range of practices in recent years that have helped him increase productivity at his farms, which are a mix of leased and owned properties south of Cairns with both volcanic red soils and clay soils.

One of his strongest successes has been an emphasis on growing peanuts during the fallow period.

He had previously grown break crops such as Meringa beans and soybeans, but settled on the peanuts as they deliver the same benefit – or more – compared to the soybeans, but also delivered an income. And he continues to be pleased with the results.

For example, last year from a 17 hectare (43 ac) area under peanuts he estimated a gross income of about \$77,000 with costs in the range of \$25,000.

“We had a very good year and had 58 percent of the crop classified as jumbo, which is what they pay mainly on,” he said. “We know they won’t do that every year. We achieved 4.5 t/ha, which is average for me, although I know 8 t/ha has been grown and should be aimed for.”

Nonetheless, for the coming season he is planning about 28 ha, which will be his biggest crop yet. “I would classify that size area for me on the coast here as high risk, because getting them off can be a real issue with the weather, so we will need a bit of luck.

“Once they are dug you need one week of dry weather before they can be threshed. I am now farming 12 months of the year with always one eye on the weather for the next seven days.”

He said peanuts needed to be sprayed for leaf diseases in the wet tropics every 7–10 days from weeks four to 16.

“I have been asked a few times why the cane grows better after peanuts. I do not know, but from observations I can

see in a row of cane the spot where the peanuts were grown, because the vigour and colour is so much better than where there was not peanuts, and this is over two and a half years later.”

Research from the Sugarcane Yield Decline Joint Venture (SYDJV) has highlighted the value in using fallows and break crops to improve soil health. The benefits include not just increased nitrogen fixated by the legume, but also a break in the nematode cycle.

Being close to the Atherton Tableland means that Mr Greenwood has been able to access affordable second-hand equipment for the peanuts. He has also invested in a GPS guidance system, which has helped with direct drilling the cane after the peanuts with minimal working the ground except for perhaps a coultter to cut the peanut hay.

He also places a strong emphasis on soil sampling and is an advocate of the SIX EASY STEPS™ program for nitrogen fertiliser application. In addition, he chooses his varieties carefully.