

Burdekin grower Paul Sgarbossa on his property in February 2016.

Coordinated effort controls RSD

Burdekin grower Paul Sgarbossa shares his views on disease control methods and the success that the district has had controlling Ratoon Stunting Disease. By Brad Pfeffer

Burdekin farmer Paul Sgarbossa has seen first-hand how vigilance and coordination can help control pests and diseases in a sugarcane growing district.

Farming on the southern side of the river near Home Hill, Mr Sgarbossa has been a Board member of the local productivity services, BSES, and local CANEGROWERS.

He has since retired from these roles, but through his extensive industry representation he saw how a coordinated approach helped to drastically reduce the problems associated with Ratoon Stunting Disease (RSD) in the district.

The use of approved seed, careful hygiene, and coordinated testing has all helped reduce the occurrences of RSD.

He also said that it required continued vigilance. With this in mind, he said that a new sampling and testing method (see previous pages) could be beneficial for ensuring the industry continued to keep RSD at bay.

"The Burdekin has always had a good approach to controlling problems like leaf scald, RSD, and sugarcane smut," Mr Sgarbossa said. "We try and flood the region with treated sugarcane and most growers try and take some every year. In the end, it is very cheap insurance."

He emphasised that hygiene was critical. "It is very important for proper clean down and sterilisation of harvesting and planting machinery, and also to ensure there are no volunteer stools in fallows or on headlands."

Mr Sgarbossa said that Burdekin Productivity Services (BPS) continued to be vigilant regarding RSD and continued its surveillance of new areas.

"RSD is a serious issue that we need to stay on top of. It is important that every grower hold some resistant varieties, so if RSD does arise then you have a better chance of battling it when it does come along," he said.

Growers can find out more about the disease-resistance ratings of sugarcane varieties through their local productivity services organisation or by using the online tool, QCANESelect™.

In the Burdekin region, the three main varieties grown are KQ228[®], Q208[®] and Q183[®].

According to QCANESelect™, Q208[®] is classified as resistant to RSD, KQ228[®] is classified as susceptible, and Q183[®] is classified as intermediate.

Emerging varieties, Q240[®] and Q252[®] are classified as resistant, while Q253[®] is classified as susceptible.

Regarding the new RSD sampling and testing method that is currently being evaluated, the work to fast-track this process came in response to demand from productivity services organisations.

Rob Milla from BPS said he was extremely supportive of fast tracking the new RSD testing procedure and that it would create a huge labour saving.

"All our field staff who collected the samples for Anthony (Young) found the procedure very simple and fast, and more importantly, with the improved accuracy of testing, there is a higher level of confidence in the data collected," Mr Milla said.