

Practice changes add up to significant efficiency gains



The Russo family at Isis is seeing big improvements to their harvesting efficiency this season after introducing a number of changes.

Childers harvesting contractor Michael Russo is pleased to see big improvements to cane quality and harvesting efficiency from a series of measures that have been introduced by the Dicanna harvesting group in 2016.

For Michael, spokesperson for the Russo family's Dicanna Harvesting, he first saw the need to make improvements after reading the SRA Harvesting Best Practice Manual and seeing the dissection of a bin at the Isis mill.

"That was the moment when we knew that we had to look at changes we could make with the machine, and the driver, whether they be things that cost money or not," Michael said.

Last year, their average ground speed was 8.5km/hour and in 2016 it is now under 6.5km/hour. They have also switched to five-blade EHS chopper drums, are aiming to optimise fan-speed in relation to ground speed, as well as more frequently changing their chopper knives.

At the end of the season, he will be comparing the group's CCS to the last four years to provide economic data.

Already though it is clear that they are getting results that are backed up by SRA demonstration trials conducted in the region and across the industry.

Both Michael and Paul Nicol believe that there is value in the new online harvesting tool, SCHLOT, in helping to set baselines for harvesting practice and determining the extra value that could be created through improved practice.

Michael said the next hurdle would be in striking the right payment system, but the region was already taking the first step by identifying the losses.

"We are working on hard economic data so that we can show that there is a piece of the pie for the whole value chain," Michael said.

"When cane prices are good, this is the perfect opportunity to make change. If we can do it now, when there are lean years in the future, then the industry will be a long way in front."

The CLEAN team is focused on collaboration and people helping people. One example from this season is work with one small harvesting group that was able to make small changes that resulted in overnight improvements in cane quality and cost savings.

The group was using a 1993 model harvester, and with a relatively small investment of less than about \$5000, they immediately saw a 0.69 increase in CCS.

"It also increased bin weight and reduced trips to the siding by 24 per week, so we are talking about gains that paid for themselves in just one week," Paul Nicol said.

SRA Adoption Group Leader, James Ogden-Brown, is based in the southern region and said that harvest losses had been identified as a priority for SRA investment and activity in the region.

"The region is looking for proof of concept regarding harvest losses. Paul and the team at Isis took the bull by the horns in dissecting the bin, and SRA has added to that through a number of demonstration trials and other activities.

"They are showing that by working together, we can achieve a positive result."

Above: Harvesting contractor Michael Russo says he is pleased with the results of a number of changes he has made this harvesting season.