



Mark Orr in the group's new JD 7210 R.

## New investment to allow for improved fertiliser efficiency

*Sharing machinery and some labour between farming enterprises is delivering efficiency gains for three Proserpine farming enterprises.*

A cooperative approach to machinery ownership is delivering productivity and efficiency benefits for the Large, Orr, and Auld families at Proserpine.

Farming 900 hectares within the one area just north of Proserpine, the three families share harvesting, planting and fertilising gear, as well as labour associated with harvesting and planting.

According to Mark Orr, they have this year continued that investment with a new John Deere 7210, and modified their fertiliser box to variable rate capability so that they can take advantage of the new mapping and recording technology offered by this tractor.

They have yet to put the rig to much work, but Mark is hoping that it will deliver major benefits to efficiency and productivity.

"It is a big step up from going to hydraulically controlling our fertiliser box and linking it with the GPS, compared to being wheel driven," he said.

The current focus is on using it to switch rates between paddocks, or ratoon-age, or between known areas of paddocks that require more or less nutrients.

Long term, they hope that they will be able to use technology such as EC maps and yield mapping in the harvester to driver further efficiency with their fertiliser application.

"We currently run a 2012 John Deere harvester that is geared up for another season, but we hope that our next harvester will have some form of yield recording," Mark said.

He said there was also a big efficiency saving from having machinery sitting in the shed less of the time.

With the exception of the new machine, tractors are typically put first to work as haul-outs and then become farm tractors once they reach about 5000 hours.

"With the farm tractors, on the trash blanket, we find that tyres wear out as much from age as from use. So just on the expense of tyres alone, before you factor in depreciation, it makes sense to be using them more often."

He said there were also benefits when it came to share-harvesting such as reducing ground speed and optimising efficiency. The harvester is able to walk between properties and the three farmers are able to work out their percentages with cutting equally.

All the farms are on 1.8 metre rows and GPS. Mark said the initial investment in GPS came as part of the Reef Rescue program (now known as the Australian Government Reef Programme) about 10 years ago, but it has since taken a life of its own, as demonstrated by their recent investment.

"We are happy with the results of both the GPS and the 1.8 metre rows and we feel so strongly about that that we were happy to buy this gear with no funding.

"With the wide rows, we have seen that this year when there has been wet weather there have been times when we have been the only group that has been cutting.

"It's not ideal, but we are only punishing a small area and there is a lot less damage to the crop."

For Mark, he is expecting the group's average to be about 95 tonnes of cane per hectare this season, but admits

that the race will be on to crush the region's crop, which has increased to an estimate of 1.9 million tonnes.

This would be the region's largest crop in 10 years.

He grows Q240<sup>th</sup> on his better soil, Q232<sup>th</sup> on the poorer soil, and Q208<sup>th</sup> as an all-rounder, with several other varieties playing a minor role.

## SRA welcomes Anthony Curro to Brandon research station

SRA has welcomed Mr Anthony Curro to the role of Adoption Officer based in the Burdekin.

In his role within the SRA Adoption Group, Mr Curro will work with sugarcane growers and millers to drive productivity and profitability improvements.

Leader of the Adoption Group, Mr James Ogden-Brown said the Adoption Group was a crucial link between the research and development conducted by SRA, and translating this into practical outcomes that can be adopted by sugarcane growers and millers.

Mr Curro is working the Burdekin with a focus on precision agriculture, and alongside fellow Adoption Officer in the region, Andres Jaramillo (irrigation).

**Right:** SRA Adoption Officer, Anthony Curro.

Mr Curro grew up in the Burdekin and worked in the family farming business consisting of horticulture, sugarcane and mango orchards on a full time basis for 12 years.

He has also studied science at JCU and worked with the industry through work at the region's Natural Resource Management organisation.

"I'm excited about the opportunity with SRA to continue working in the Burdekin and also taking on the discipline of precision agriculture," Mr Curro said.

