

Ready to roll. The group travelled from Mossman to the Burdekin in April 2016.



Next Gen farmers have a look over the fence

Next Gen Farmers have recently investigated harvest losses and value chain improvements through a Sugar Industry Travel and Learning Award through SRA. By Gerard Puglisi, Next Gen Officer

Our primary industries face unique challenges managing the impacts of physical, social, and economic change. How industry participants embrace new technologies will also continue to be of substantial importance. Next Generation leaders have a vital role to play in the future development and sustainability of the industry.

Through sharing their learning experiences as a group, Next Gen participants can better evaluate their leanings and more confidently adopt these into their own farming operations. Next Gen participants who are not the key decision makers of their farming operations can better present the case for trialling new concepts which may lead to practice change. The regular interaction of Next Gen participants within and between regions builds a reticulation of knowledge sharing and support. On the April 18 a group of 14 Next Generation participants from Mossman to Northern NSW left Mossman on a four-day trip to the Burdekin and back to Mossman.

The purpose of the trip was to provide next generation growers with greater knowledge and build their skills on minimising harvest losses, value chain improvements, farming systems, production management, how other regions work, and to build networks with other next generation people in other regions of the sugar industry.

Next Gen and the participants would like to thank SRA, ACFA, and QSL for their support and the opportunity to attend this educational journey through the northern part of the Australian sugar industry.

The knowledge gained from this project will be used by the participants to help them with the adoption of new technology and research, and also with decision making to improve their farming businesses.

Some farming practice changes include:

- Reviewing farm layouts for harvest.
- Explore commercial profitable alternative crops.
- Control traffic with the aid of a GPS to minimise compaction.
- Step Up, to gain Smart Cane accreditation.
- Take more soil samples and increase the focus on soil health.
- Optimise drainage on their farms.
- Use the QCANESelect™ tool in optimising varieties on their farms.
- Modification to harvesters to minimise losses through the chopper system.
- Uptake of new farming methods including GPS guidance.
- Reduced tillage.
- Electronic record keeping.
- Variable rate fertiliser boxes.
- Move to liquid fertilisers for planting and ratoon crops.
- Increased water efficiency and optimised timing of operations.

Day 1

The group met in Mossman and travelled to Innisfail to meet with John Bletsas, Manager of Soils First, to demonstrate new products and methods to improve soil health and nutrient management.

After lunch the group travelled to MSF's Silkwood farm to meet with Robert Brooks, Harvest Manager North QLD to discussed harvesting methods, alternative row spacing and viewed modifications to a cane harvester. MSF are now farming most of their northern farms using controlled traffic on 2m centers with an 800mm wide row.

Day 2

The group started in Townsville where we met with Carla Keith from QSL to receive an update of QSL activities and also to have a tour of the Townsville Bulk Sugar Terminal.

The group then travelled to Ayr to meet with Tiffany Hunt, Extension Agronomist from Burdekin Productivity Services (BPS) and Burdekin Next Gen Representative, to explain her role within the industry. The group was then shown the benefits of rice as an alternative crop which is now being grown commercially in the area.

The group then meet with Chris Hesp to view his alternative irrigation method and also had the opportunity to meet with SRA staff which were on Chris's farm conducting variety trials for new varieties to be released in the industry.

The group then had dinner with members of the Burdekin Next Gen group to discuss industry related issues and they also received a demonstration of the new Soil Info System soil analysis from Bryan Granshaw. The new system looks at the subsurface with the aim to grow a better crop.

Day 3

The group travelled to Ingham to meet with Phil Patane from SRA, where the group learned about recent updates to the SRA Harvesting Best Practice manual and a report on minimising harvester losses within the industry.

After lunch the group received a presentation from Manager of Herbert Cane Productivity Services (HCPSSL), Lawrence Di Bella, to discuss environmental issues in the Herbert area and, more specifically, run-off related issues. After the presentation from Lawrence we had the opportunity to meet with other young sugarcane farmers from the district to share their experience of growing sugarcane in the Herbert.

Day 4

The group travelled to Tully for a meeting with Greg Shannon from Tully Sugar and Jordan Villaruz from Tully Cane Productivity Services to explain their roles within the industry.

The most important knowledge gained by this project has been a greater understanding of the issues facing the whole agricultural sector. It contributed to increasing our communication skills as well as our ability to interact with others.

Through these skills, participants will be able to pass on information more effectively in their local networks. It is also important to keep young growers coming into the industry and the best way to do this is through maintaining networks of communication.

One of the participants said: "I will be using the information I gained on the Next Gen Bus trip to have a more positive outlook and I now also have the confidence to take on some of the challenges facing our industry because I learnt that all of agriculture faces similar problems and they are all possible to overcome."



Clockwise from top left:

Gearing up to visit the bulk sugar terminal.

The Next Gen group discussed harvest best practice on the recent bus tour.

Touring the bulk sugar terminal with QSL.