

Ongoing weed control battle to assist long-term productivity



As a new entrant to sugarcane farming, Damian Wirth has put a strong focus on Smartcane BMP and in particular farming practices such as weed and nutrient management to get himself started.
By Brad Pfeffer

Having recently purchased a sugarcane farm, Damian Wirth has taken to the fast adoption of technology and best practice so that he can get himself established.

Mr Wirth bought the property at Garadunga near Innisfail about two years ago and said that it was important that from day one he ensured that he had the latest information on productivity issues such as crop nutrition and weed control.

"Like everyone in the industry, the aim is to try and do everything to get the best return, and also to look after the land to ensure everything is done sustainably," he said.

"To start, we have done a lot of work with our weed control and reducing weed pressure, which began with learning what the weeds are and how to control them."

He also has set about ensuring optimum crop nutrition, and started this process last year through attending a SIX EASY STEPS workshop run by SRA and funded by Terrain NRM.

"We are making sure we are following programs such as SIX EASY STEPS, and for this last 12 months we have undertaken Smartcane BMP accreditation.

"It has been a steep learning curve, but it is something that I have enjoyed."

"I've also had the chance to have SRA trials on my property through the weed researchers Emilie Fillols and Tim Staier based at Meringa, and had an industry field walk at my property that explained that research."

"That has been a fantastic way to learn about different types of weeds, how those weeds react with different chemicals, and the best way to manage them, whether that be mechanical or chemical."

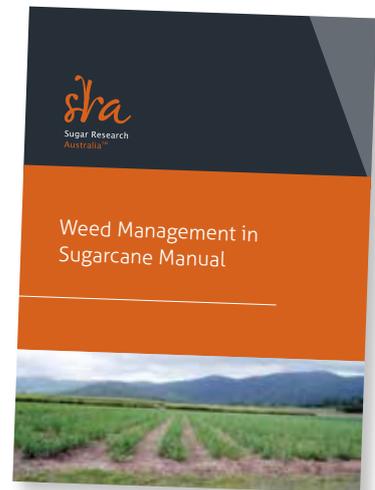
Part of Damian's work has been returning country to production after it has not grown cane for a long period.

This means that he is very conscious that it will be several years before he can reduce the weed pressure. Large rainfall events make that harder too, of course.

"We had over 805mm in early January, which put nearly 90 percent of the farm under water, with some of the water nearly six feet deep.

"From the drainage plans we have in place, the water was able to get away fairly quickly, and I estimate there was about 12 acres that was under water for more than three days.

"The crop there will be affected, but for the rest of it we have had showers since that have washed the mud off the cane, and I hope that it will now spring up and get growing."



He feels that this work and the other improved practices are already having an impact.

In 2016, he harvested 18 hectares, with just under 3ha for plants. For that 18ha, he harvested the same tonnage as he did in 2015 (his first year) from the total 21ha.

He has planted another 12ha of cane for this year and hopes that 2017 is another reasonable season.

Mr Wirth is pictured above with the new *Weed Management in Sugarcane Manual*, which has been produced by SRA.

The manual is available on request from SRA via Andrea Evers (aevs@sugarresearch.com.au or 07 3331 3308).