



Joe Trimarchi checks over third ratoon Q231[®] in January 2017.

Solid 2016 result at Tolga on the Tableland

Having grown a range of rotational crops in the past, Joe Trimarchi is looking beyond the traditional crops and vegetables that are subject to wild market variations to something he has not tried before.

Managing to avoid the worst of the wet weather problems during the 2016 harvest that hit most coastal sugarcane growers, Atherton Tableland farmer Joe Trimarchi said that 2016 ended up being a very good year for sugarcane production.

Producing about 11,000 tonne from his 80 hectare property at Tolga, he said that he was also able to average about one unit above the mill on CCS, supplying MSF Sugar's Tableland Mill.

He grows varieties including KQ228[®], Q208[®], and is also impressed with the first few years of the variety Q231[®]. Crops are all grown with the support of irrigation, including from one centre pivot and two lateral move irrigators supplied by groundwater.

A key part of Joe's farming system is ensuring a rotational crop is grown at the end of the sugarcane cycle.

In the past, this has included crops such as navy bean, potatoes, rice, grass seeds, peanuts, and maize.

Moving forward, he is in the process of investigating the role of industrial hemp as another option in the sugarcane cropping cycle.

This includes hemp that could be used for grain, or fibre, or both. Medicinal cannabis is also something that he is exploring with business partner, Shane Garozzo, under licence from the Queensland Government.

Industrial fibre crops have been researched within the industry in the past, including by SRA's predecessor organisations SRDC and BSES, because of their potential as another crop to break the sugarcane monoculture and improve the subsequent cane cycle.

One of the main barriers to growth of the crop has been the lack of a tropical variety, and a processing plant for the crop.

"Having a tropical variety is critical to ensure it will yield, and also so that it does not stress and its THC levels are affected, which impacts government control of the crop," Mr Garozzo said.

Mr Trimarchi and Mr Garozzo said they are in the process of breeding several new varieties to accommodate different markets, climates, and soils, and that they are also seeking to establish a group of growers looking to grow hemp as profitable rest crop for cane.