

New MSF partnership to help the Reef



MSF Sugar is partnering with the Australian Government and growers to improve the quality of the water entering the Great Barrier Reef.

The Australian Government has announced funding of \$4.5 million for the delivery of MSF Sugar's Project Uplift Farming Systems Initiative.

The initiative will be delivered over the next five years as part of the fifth investment phase of the Australian Government's Reef Trust, which will be supplemented by an estimated \$12.8 million co-investment by MSF Sugar and growers engaged to participate in the initiative.

MSF Sugar CEO, Mike Barry, said the partnership is significant as "The Project Uplift Farming Systems Initiative represents a new and unique approach to engaging with cane farmers to improve on-farm practices".

"It is unique as the project is an industry-led initiative being driven as a partnership between MSF Sugar, Sugar Research Australia (SRA) and the sugarcane industry, who together aim to improve on-farm nutrient management practices and therefore improve the quality of water entering the Reef lagoon," Mr Barry said.

Over the next five years, MSF Sugar will establish 36 farming groups who will be assisted in the transition from existing farming systems to new, more efficient farming systems that lead to Smartcane BMP accreditation at 'above industry standard'.

The new farming system is based on the recently developed SRA Farming System which uses legume crop rotation, green cane trash blanketing, minimum tillage and controlled traffic to minimise soil compaction and reduce farm water runoff.

Under the project, the majority of grower groups invited to participate will be located in the Wet Tropics with a smaller number in the Burnett Mary region. The Reef Trust grant funding will be delivered in conjunction with loan financing to be provided by MSF Sugar and will leverage significant private investment and contributions from participating sugarcane farmers.

In addition to being a unique industry approach, according to MSF Sugar's General Manager Agriculture, Trevor Crook, the project is significant. The Project Uplift Farming Systems Initiative builds on a successful pilot project currently underway in far north Queensland's Mulgrave area that has been funded and led by MSF Sugar. Through the pilot, harvest figures on trial blocks have been shown to produce exactly twice the return to growers in terms of dollars per hectare year on year, while minimising fertiliser runoff and other environmental impacts.

"Through the pilot, we demonstrated the importance of reviewing and updating cane farming systems. Using the SRA Farming System the pilot farms have vastly improved water retention year on year which has had a positive impact on water runoff," Mr Crook said.

MSF Sugar has a vision to transform its mills from sugar manufacturing to bio-technology hubs where a multitude of different products will be produced. Achieving this goal requires a stable and resilient cane supply network which can only be achieved if the sector remains viable and profitable.

Above: Mulgrave grower Paul Gregory is one farmer who has been involved in MSF's Project Uplift.