



Expansion and improvement to target long-term vision

The Greensill family at Bundaberg is taking a long-term view of expansion and investment to ensure their agribusiness is set-up for long term profitability and sustainability. By Brad Pfeffer

The Greensill family is certainly not new to agriculture. They have been farming cane and other crops across Bundaberg and the wider region for three generations.

But what has changed has been a significant expansion of their operation and major investments in farming infrastructure across several properties in the Bundaberg region, to the point where they now farm close to 2000 hectares, which includes about 400ha that they farm for Bundaberg sugar.

The operation is bringing together sugarcane with watermelons and sweet potatoes, in an agribusiness that is seeking to extract maximum efficiency, sustainability and return on investment from their resources.

"The melons and sweet potato complement the cane from a risk point of view and also for ensuring a rotation

that reduces soil pathogens and insect pressure, while really delivering a decent rotation for all crops," Peter Greensill said. "Growing cane in the rotation allows us to bring scale and efficiency to the horticultural operation, where we are able to focus on aggregated fields with appropriate earthworks for drainage.

"We find that as we make a more efficient sugar business, we are also building a significantly more efficient horticultural business."

The cane is grown on 1.78m, the sweet potatoes on 1.5m and the watermelons on 3m. The rotation varies in length but Peter said ideally they were aiming to grow both the horticultural crops within 12 months so they don't miss cropping time with their cane.

Peter owns the business with his brothers Andrew and Lex. Peter is CEO of Greensill Farming Group, while

Andrew is part of the earthmoving and land development team in the family agribusiness. Lex is based in the UK and CEO and founder of international supply chain and finance provider, Greensill Capital.

They have been expanding notably since 2010, but 2017 has been a particularly busy year for the Greensill family. For example, as part of an expansion on a previously undeveloped farm at Wallaville, they have moved more than a million cubic metres of soil in preparing paddocks and modifying how water moves across the farm, as well as building dams and reticulation.

They have meticulously planned each development using aerial mapping technology to ensure maximum efficiency of layout and that the irrigation and drainage infrastructure is exactly how they want it.

"Part of our rationale for this development is that we weren't buying an existing farm and having to tear out infrastructure to develop it in the way we want," Peter said. "We can factor that into the purchase price and invest that capital at the start by doing it right and doing it once, which will set us up for long-term efficient farming."

Peter said they had approached each development this way, and also applied this philosophy to some of their existing farms.

For example, one farm that they purchased was only able to irrigate 2.8mm per day, which was far short of their summer requirements of 6-8mm per day.

"That 2.8mm was also costing us \$180/ML as we were lifting water directly from the river. So we had pumps and motors sized for other applications and pipes that hadn't been sized correctly. "That led us to the hard decision to rip that infrastructure out and resize it, where we can now apply 16mm per day.

"That allows us to look at the weather forecast and turn water off early if there is rain on the way, but also know that we can catch up if it doesn't rain. We can also use some off-peak power as opposed to 24 hour irrigating. Through that process we have reduced the power cost from \$180/ML, in that extreme situation, to \$42/ML as a blended average across the farm."

He said these investments were "multi-generational", which although have a big up-front cost, they pay off over the long term.

They use high-pressure irrigation for germination, if required, but use mostly furrow irrigation once the cane is established. As part of an approach of ensuring they are efficient and sustainable with their inputs, water is reticulated to capture any sediment and nutrient run-off. In that vein, soil tests are done every year and nutrients are applied accordingly. They use mill mud to augment existing fertiliser application, and have been particularly pleased with its results on country they have developed.

The Greensills have also been one of the first to invest in a CaneTec harvester, a locally designed machine with a gross weight of about 12 tonnes. Peter said he was happy with the uniformity of billets produced by the machine, that it helped to reduce compaction, and its reliability.

"We are keen to support local innovation and are excited to see how it goes in coming years," he said.

The cane alone, which includes their own planting and harvesting, is a massive undertaking. With the horticultural crops and earthmoving thrown in, the business now has a team of over 150 including seasonal workers. Peter said the key to keeping things running smoothly was to keep actively involved, lead by example, and having a great team.

"We are aware that big businesses can have inefficiencies as well as efficiencies, particularly such as being cumbersome or slow to react. So we've worked very hard to ensure our growth has embraced the efficiencies of large-scale agribusiness and sugar production."



Above (left): Southern Region Adoption Officer, James Ogden-Brown, and Peter Greensill on farm in October this year. **Above (right):** A view over one of the farms. **Opposite:** CEO of Greensill Farming, Peter Greensill, is making investments in farming infrastructure to set the business up for the long-term.

