



# Making the good better

**SRA's Soil Health Project team.** (Back from left): Richard Brackin (UQ), Darren Oliveri (Wilmar), Peter Larson (Wilmar), Paul Marbelli (Herbert grower), Richard Hobbs (HCP SL), Willy Lucas (Burdekin grower), Armin Wessel (Burdekin grower), Terry Granshaw (BPS), Davey Olsen (SRA), Rob Milla (BPS), Andrew Dougall (MSF), Mark Poggio (DAF), Alan Lynn (Herbert grower), Felice Driver (SRA), Vince Russo (Herbert grower), Bernard Schroeder (USQ). (Front from left): Seb Garcia-Cuenca (SRA), Andrea Evers (SRA), Lawrence Di Bella (HCP SL), Caleb Connolly (DAF) and Cy Kovacich (Burdekin grower). Absent: Michael Carey.

*When it comes to putting in place a new farming system in order to improve soil health and gain the associated benefits, it can seem a long and arduous journey. But for those who have implemented the learnings of the Sugar Yield Decline Joint Venture, it's been a journey worth taking. **By Andrea Evers***

Growers, researchers, adoption officers and extension providers met in Townsville recently for the launch meeting of the SRA-funded Soil Health Project. They shared their views on soil health, what they will bring to the project and what they hope to gain from participating in the project.

It was clear that this project is unique, with each member of the project team playing an equally important role in its direction and outcomes, which is exactly what Davey Olsen, project leader, had in mind.

"The Soil Health Project brings people with different skill sets together to form a cohesive team that will work as peers to develop knowledge, materials and tools that will improve the way in which improved farming systems practices can be implemented on farm. The potential benefits to the industry are huge."

The project is currently working in the Burdekin and Herbert regions with six demonstration growers who will test improved farming system practices, suited to their farm and conditions, alongside their current farming practices.

The central aim of the project is to enable growers and millers to grow more cane and increase profits by working with them to adopt farming practices that lead to improved soil health.

The project will also test and analyse soils collected from long term paired site farms.

These are farms located close to each other where one farmer has implemented an improved farming system for the past 10+ years, while the other has maintained a conventional farming system.

The project team will measure the long term changes on soil health and farm economics arising from these contrasting farming systems.

The data collected will also provide baselines from which soil health monitoring tools and methodologies will be developed, that can be adapted to the rest of the industry.

Speaking at the meeting were two growers who had implemented an improved farming system and reported the benefits that their businesses had gained.

While both experienced some anxiety when first taking the journey, after seeing the advantages, the new farming system has become their 'new normal' and neither have looked back.

These growers will also lend their support to the project by sharing their experiences with the demonstration growers.

**For further information about this project**

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