



SRA Woodford: 21 years of delivering outcomes for the industry

SRA's Woodford Research Station celebrates 21 years in operation this year. Work undertaken here gives the industry a much better understanding of disease resistance ratings of new varieties and it provides a critical function in the overall biosecurity and plant breeding picture.

BY SAMANTHA RYALLS

Our Woodford site was purchased in July 1997 and this year celebrates 21 years in operation.

The site was purchased specifically for use as a pathology farm, with the primary purpose being to screen potential new sugarcane varieties for resistance to diseases. The first disease-resistance screening trials started there in 1998. The site was chosen because it was a reasonable distance from existing cane farms, reducing the risk that disease may spread from the station to commercial crops.

Work undertaken at the Woodford Research Station gives our researchers

a much better understanding of disease resistance ratings of new varieties, information that is presented within our annual variety guide publications and online via QCANSelect®. Woodford provides a critical function in the overall biosecurity / plant breeding picture.

Pathology testing to develop disease resistance ratings is a carefully controlled and resource intensive process, and therefore has been focussed upon the late stages of the breeding program. However, following recent improvements that SRA has made to the breeding process, SRA is also working towards discovering more detail about disease-resistance earlier in the plant breeding

cycle. This strategy is designed to maximise the number of clones promoted to Final Assessment Trials (FATs) that meet minimum disease standards, which in turn allows greater selection pressure and genetic progress for yield and CCS (commercial cane sugar). Woodford, along with Pachymetra screening at SRA Tully, is a critical component of this work.

Our Woodford site is also occasionally used as a teaching centre by our leading researchers including courses for both introductory and advanced diseases workshops, allowing the learnings to happen in a hands-on environment.

In 2012/13, the smut resistance screening (previously in Bundaberg



since the smut incursion in 2006) was moved to Woodford which saw Shamsul Bhuiyan bring his expertise to Woodford and brought their staff numbers to five. Nicole Thompson moved to Woodford in October 2017, after 11 years at Indooroopilly, and she now lives on site.

The longest standing staff member at Woodford is Principal Technician Andrew Greet, who has been at this site since it first opened. He has been with our organisation for 26 years, commencing in Tully in 1992, transferring to Eight Mile Plains in 1997 and to Woodford in 1999.

The other full time staff are Chris Watson (Farm Technician) and Kylie Garlick (Technician). It is currently their busy time of year (May – late October during trials) so there are also up to four casual staff helping. The team have some regular casuals who have several years' experience assisting with the processes required.

From about mid-May to mid-August, they receive around 400-600 clones every two weeks for processing and preparation for disease resistance trials.

In September they begin the field planting. The trials have different designs and replicates, depending on the disease being assessed. Assessment for disease resistance also varies for each different disease, but they try to be as efficient as possible and produce results for the plant breeding team to use in their selection programs.

Best wishes to the team at Woodford as they celebrate their 21st year in operation. ■

(Over page) Technician Lucy Gibbs and Principal Researcher Nicole Thompson in the field. (Above left) Principal Researcher Nicole Thompson inspecting samples in the germination chamber. (Top right) Technician Lucy Gibbs collecting punch samples. (Bottom right) Stephen Houtsma cutting the cane into one-eye-sets.

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