



Herbert growers and millers head south to learn more on harvest efficiency

It is well known that sugarcane growers and millers enjoy looking over the other side of the fence to see how they can improve things on their own turf.

Thanks to an initiative by Sugar Research Australia (SRA) and Wilmar Sugar, this 'looking over the fence' has taken a step further for a group of growers and millers from the Herbert region, with the group looking much further afield than their own district.

The group has recently travelled from the Herbert region in North Queensland to Rocky Point near the Gold Coast and Childers in the Southern Region. The aim of the trip was to learn from millers, growers and harvesting contractors in these southern parts of the industry and discover how they are adopting

practices that are helping them to optimise harvesting efficiency.

The trip was jointly funded through an SRA Travel and Learning Award and Wilmar Sugar.

Herbert Regional Operations Manager for Wilmar Sugar, Mr Adam Douglas, said that the group was returning to the Herbert armed with more information about the impact of cane loss and extraneous matter on a farm's bottom line.

"Our objective was to meet and collaborate with Rocky Point and Childers growers who have changed their harvesting practice," Mr Douglas said.

"It has been an opportunity to learn about the potential to increase profitability by reducing cane loss and extraneous matter levels."

SRA Adoption Officer for Harvesting, Phil Patane, said that the trip was a chance to visit during the harvest season, which put everything into context for making harvest best practice work.

"Through research and demonstration trials, we know that there is potential to improve harvesting efficiency and therefore put more revenue into the value chain," Mr Patane said.

"From trial results in 2017, it was identified that the industry could potentially obtain a 5.5 percent increase in harvested tonnes with no cane land increase and a \$74 million increase in shared industry revenue if operating at harvesting best practice recommendations.



“However, we also know that optimising harvesting is complex and a range of factors have to be considered. This is why it is so valuable for the group from the Herbert to engage with their peers in the southern region.

“We are all operating in one Australian industry, but also across a vast geographic distance, so this trip was a rare and valuable opportunity for the millers and growers from the Herbert.

“This was a chance for them to ask questions and consider how their own operation compares.”

Ingham grower Paul Marbelli said he had not had the chance to visit the Rocky Point and Childers regions before, so this was a unique opportunity.

“The trip has been interesting to see how other districts are doing things,” Mr Marbelli said. “We can’t compare everything between regions, as there are unique conditions down here, but it has been interesting to learn how these farmers and contractors are dealing with their situations.”

This work adds to existing industry engagement on harvesting efficiency through a project through the Rural R&D for Profit program funded by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, SRA, and the Queensland Government. ■



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture
and Water Resources

(Over page) Herbert growers Paul Marbelli (left) and Charles Girgenti (centre) spoke with Rocky Point harvesting contractor Nick Skopp about how he had adjusted his harvesting practices to reduce cane losses in the field.

(Top left) Michael Russo (right) talks harvesting optimisation with Herbert growers and millers.

(Top right) Herbert grower Charles Girgenti walking through the Isis mill with Wilmar staff Paul Giordani and Luis Rodriguez.

(Middle right) Robyn Oliver, Isis Central Sugar Mill, explains her work in the lab, the mill’s use of NIR, and how this links to cane quality.

(Bottom right) Michael Russo (Dicanna Harvesting) and Paul Nicol (Chief Field Officer, Isis Mill) check out just how good base-cutter blades are for cutting cane, after bolting them to the handle of a cane knife.