

Engagement and collaboration in action with SIX EASY STEPS

SRA IS WORKING WITH THE LOCAL INDUSTRY AT ROCKY POINT TO DEVELOP SIX EASY STEPS NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES FOR THE AREA.

Until recently, Rocky Point grower Josh Keith had not heard of the SIX EASY STEPS nutrient management guidelines.

It was only when he attended a local industry workshop that he had the chance to learn more about the industry's guidelines for nutrient management and the work that occurs to ensure the science behind the guidelines is robust and credible.

"I heard about SIX EASY STEPS a second time as we made our way through Smartcane BMP accreditation. I kept hearing that when people use SIX EASY STEPS they are saving money and are more profitable," Josh said. "So, I thought 'that's what I want!'"

Josh then contacted SRA Regional Coordinator for New South Wales and Rocky Point, Sebastian Garcia-Cuenca, to initiate the process of developing guidelines for the Rocky Point district.

Rocky Point is the final district to have SIX EASY STEPS guidelines developed.

As part of that process, some of the SIX EASY STEPS team has been in the region in recent months, digging 11 soil pits and collecting samples on a range of different soil types and conditions. This information will be used to create a soils booklet for the district and the local SIX EASY STEPS nutrient management guidelines for growers.

Following the development of the soils booklet and nutrient management guidelines, events and training for growers will be organised to learn more about the guidelines and how to put them into practice on their own farms.

SRA Principal Technician John Panitz spoke to some of the local growers during this initial field work, and said that the process of developing the guidelines for a district begins by looking at existing soil maps and information, as well as current fertiliser practices, and then moves onto collecting samples.

He added that as the guidelines were developed and introduced to a district, the team also looked to instigate strip trials on growers' farms to validate the findings and ensure that the growers were engaged through the process.

Professor (Farming Systems) with the University of Southern Queensland, Bernard Schroeder, also spoke to growers and he said that the pits were a useful tool for informing the science of nutrient management, and also for having a conversation with growers.

"The pits start a discussion about the soil types in the district, and the samples we collect from these reference sites will also be used in future workshops," Prof Schroeder said. "Rocky Point is a relatively small area, but it contains a similar diversity of soil types to many large districts."

Josh Keith said that growers were very interested in SIX EASY STEPS and having a tool that is backed by science to help them make decisions.

"All the small factors, including managing your nutrients, add up to that extra bit of profit," he said. "This is especially important for us at Rocky Point as we face pressures from issues like sand mining and urban encroachment."

"Through this work from SRA developing guidelines for our district, we will have information to make better management decisions." ■

Growers across the industry can access more information about SIX EASY STEPS for their local district via the SRA website www.sugarresearch.com.au/growers-and-millers/farming-systems/

The SIX EASY STEPS team consists of Bernard Schroeder, John Panitz, Gavin Rodman, Barry Salter, Danielle Skocaj, Eric Kok, Alan Hurney, David Calcino, Andrew Wood, and Zofia Ostatek-Boczynski.

(Above) The team working on developing the guidelines for Rocky Point: Sebastian Garcia-Cuenca, Bernard Schroeder, John Panitz, Victor Schwenke, and Gavin Rodman.

(Over - clockwise from top) Bernard Schroeder explaining the soil type at one of the sites used to develop SIX EASY STEPS guidelines for Rocky Point.

Rocky Point grower Lindsay Mischke and New South Wales SRA Regional Coordinator, Sebastian Garcia-Cuenca.

Sebastian Garcia-Cuenca and Gavin Rodman collecting soil samples.

Managing Director of Rocky Point Mill, David Heck, with Professor Bernard Schroeder (University of Southern Queensland) and SRA Adoption Officer Gavin Rodman.



WHAT IS SIX EASY STEPS?

SIX EASY STEPS is a science-based nutrient management tool that enables the adoption of best practice nutrient management on-farm. It is acknowledged as industry best-practice for nutrient management to optimise productivity and profitability without adversely influencing soil fertility or causing off-farm effects. SRA's participation in this research ensures that the industry has a credible and science-based voice at the table that can inform policy discussions. SRA continues to collaborate with a range of research partners to see SIX EASY STEPS further validated across a range of soil types, farming systems and climatic conditions.

The SIX EASY STEPS to improved nutrient management

1. Knowing and understanding our soils
2. Understanding and managing nutrient processes and losses
3. Soil testing regularly
4. Adopting soil specific fertiliser recommendations
5. Checking on the adequacy of fertiliser inputs
6. Keeping good records and modifying nutrient inputs when and where necessary

The concept of SIX EASY STEPS means combining a number of possible actions to ensure sustainable nutrient usage on the farm. This combination forms a 'whole system' approach to nutrient management.

