

An information sheet on pineapple sett rot is available under the diseases section of the SRA website. Visit [www.sugarresearch.com.au](http://www.sugarresearch.com.au).

# Stopping the rot: demo trials delivering local information

**A DEMONSTRATION TRIAL IN THE WET TROPICS IS LOOKING AT DIFFERENT FUNGICIDE TREATMENTS FOR PINEAPPLE SETT ROT, TO GIVE GROWERS MORE LOCALISED INFORMATION TO INFORM THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS.**

**El Arish district farmer Danny Pantovic farms in one of the wettest districts of the industry, so he understands the risk from Pineapple sett rot.**

He has seen severe impacts from the disease in the past, and therefore he always ensures that his planting contractor uses a fungicide treatment.

"After it hits, you are always wondering if you should knock the block out, even though it might be young," he said. "I hope for five or six ratoons, but I've had to knock blocks out on the third ratoon when the yield hasn't been there."

Pineapple sett rot is a soil-borne disease and is favoured by conditions that slow germination of cane – cold, wet soil, or excessively dry soil. It gets its name from the smell of freshly split billets, which have an odour like an over-ripe pineapple.

To understand more about the pineapple sett rot, Danny has been working with Tully Sugar Limited (TSL) on a demonstration plot on his farm, assessing three of the registered fungicides that are on the market – Sinkers, Shirtan, and Tilt.

It is important that growers follow the label. For Sinkers, this means using adjuvant. Nufarm suggest Activator at 50ml/100L, but any good quality wetter will suffice.

"I am very interested in these trials and especially to see them in my conditions," Danny said. "There are a few options with treatment, so with Tully Sugar's help this is helping us make more informed decisions."

Cane Productivity and Development Manager for TSL, Greg Shannon, is doing the work in collaboration with Nufarm Australia and planting contractor Gab Camilleri, and Greg said that the work came about because the local industry was keen to learn more about their fungicide options. These demonstrations commenced in 2016.

Greg said that two out of the last three years – both 2016 and 2018 – had been very dry after planting and therefore the risk of pineapple sett rot was low. This means it is still early days for their assessments.

He said the overall conclusion from the last three years was that good billet

coverage with fungicide is essential, no matter what type of fungicide is used.

He said they had also seen the benefit of using a fungicide even when the risk was low. "It also highlights the need to regularly check the spray application nozzles for blockages, which would be the only practical reason a fungicide would not be applied at plant," Greg said.

At the time of writing, the demo had been assessed at 45 days and all treatments were performing well – but again the dry conditions proved less-than-ideal for a fungicide demonstration plot.

Most of the rain gauges at Tully gathered dust from August to October this year.

The cane in these pictures was photographed in early October and had no herbicide applied after planting.

"It has been a cheap crop this year, and there's been nothing to germinate weeds," Danny said. "Here we are in October and this crop hasn't had any residual, 2-4,D, anything."

Another important component of Danny Pantovic's farming system is the use of



a mixed species fallow crop (again with Greg's help) which includes plants such as sunflower, millet, and various legumes. He said he does this to help keep on top of weeds, for the yield benefit, and also because it helps control diseases.

He grows a range of varieties across his 270 hectares, including Q253<sup>®</sup>, Q208<sup>®</sup> and Q250<sup>®</sup>, as well as having planted out some SRA10<sup>®</sup>, SRA6<sup>®</sup>, and SRA7<sup>®</sup>. Danny is part of the TSL led Tully Variety Management group, and has hosted variety trials in El Arish since 2014. This year he has planted a trial plot of 4ha of SRA1<sup>®</sup> to test its millability in 2019, as part of the ongoing Tully Variety Management Group work. This will be one of the first blocks of this variety to go through the rollers at the Tully mill as a trial. ■

*(Over page) El Arish district farmer Danny Pantovic said on-farm demonstrations were a great way of improving local information and understanding of different farm practices. (Above) Cane Productivity and Development Manager with Tully Sugar, Greg Shannon, discussing results at about 45 days after planting with Danny Pantovic.*

## PREVENTION AND CONTROL

- Use a registered fungicide to thoroughly cover the sett, particularly the cut ends.
- If possible, plant when weather conditions favour rapid germination and soil temperatures are above 18°C.
- Because pineapple sett rot is carried in the soil, you should try to reduce the number of spores to limit the potential for the disease. You can do this using a rotational crop or fallow period between cane crops. Don't plough out replant because it is an ideal food for the fungus which would only create high numbers of spores in the soil.
- You will increase the chance of germination if you use two or three bud setts. The nodes act as a barrier, which can slow the spread of the fungus in the sett. They also protect the buds sufficiently until they germinate.
- Ensure that base-cutter and chopper box blades on harvesters cutting billets are sharp to give a clean cut and prevent cracking of setts. Rubber coated and synchronising feed-rollers will reduce damage to the rind of setts, which can provide entry points for the fungi.
- Ensure soil has a good tilth and that there is good soil-sett contact – try pressing the rollers to compact the drill after planting.
- If using fungicide dip type planters, ensure the dip tank is cleaned regularly to reduce contamination of the fungicide with dirt.