



Wider rows improve efficiency at Bloomsbury

WIDER ROW SPACINGS HAVE LOWERED LABOUR AND WEAR-AND-TEAR COSTS FOR GARY CONSIDINE AT BLOOMSBURY, AND HE IS HAPPY WITH THE RESULTS.

Driving from Proserpine to Brisbane in a car is enough to make anyone tired.

But the thought of doing it in a harvester is a whole new level of weariness, according to Gary Considine, and it is something that he hopes he never has to learn about.

However, since widening his row widths from 1.6 metres to 1.9 metres (dual), he reckons that his harvester now travels about 1000km less each year, or roughly the same distance as the drive from his farm at Bloomsbury down to Brisbane.

The harvester is co-owned with two other growers – Tony Jeppesen and Scott Simpson – and they have also changed their row spacing. Between the three growers, and also with some contract work, their harvester cuts about 100,000 tonnes each year, across over 1000 hectares.

“We’ve saved about 17 percent of our row length, which equates to a lot of fuel, and a lot of savings on wear and tear on expensive components like tracks,” Gary said.

Gary changed his spacing about 15 years ago and said that although it came with some considerable investment, it has delivered good results.

Compaction is kept well away from the plants and harvesting in wet conditions is much easier.

He admits that row spacing is just one part of the puzzle with cane production, but added that his yields averaged about 95 tonnes per hectare even through some recent dry years, and a big factor driving the yield has been the wide rows.

Then there is the same savings on fuel and time in the paddock with other machinery operations, making it a cheaper crop to grow.

To make the transition, one of the more expensive changes was widening his high-rise sprayer by putting hydraulic rams in the wheels, which was necessary for getting around the farm and being able to safely cross a narrow bridge.

Fifteen years on, any new equipment is set up on 1.9 metres from the start and all tractors, trucks and the harvester are set up for 1.9m. “We based the 1.9m all around the harvester,” he said.

His usual program at the end of the crop cycle is to spray out the cane, disc it in March and plant soybeans (although some years, like 2018, the dry weather beats him).

Then it is disced, worked with a bed renovator and mound former that is four rows wide, which helps to reduce time in the paddock. Pre-emergent is usually used at planting, and knock-downs such as 2,4-D used early in the season to control vines as needed.

He said he liked the dual row because it helps with weed control and “stools out better” when compared to wide single-row, but added that after Cyclone Debbie (2017) they had to plant in single row because they couldn’t clean the plants to get the billets to feed properly through the double disc openers.

His main varieties are Q208[®] and Q183[®], along with some Q242[®] and Q240[®].

He has supplementary irrigation applied though water winches, furrow, and one centre pivot. ■

(Over page) Gary Considine’s sprayer, modified with hydraulic rams for the wheels to fit his 1.9 metre (dual) row and still be able to cross a narrow bridge.

(Below) Gary Considine checks over this year’s crop in January 2019.

