



# Clean seed underpins production in northern NSW

**A HEALTHY CROP STARTS WITH CLEAN SEED, ACCORDING TO NSW GROWER KEITH ROBINSON.**

**New South Wales grower Keith Robinson is passionate about sourcing clean seed cane for his farm.**

Farming at Kilgin in the Broadwater mill area, he has been using clean seed for more than 25 years, dating back to when he previously worked at the mill.

"We see clean seed as one of those basics like weed control, and which really makes a difference on the farm," Keith said.

He says it has helped with plant vigour, disease management, and overall productivity, and he acknowledged the hard work of Sunshine Sugar's Ag Services in having all three mill areas of NSW among the very top users of clean seed in the entire industry.

As well as getting the basics right around clean seed, Keith is also keen to learn as much as he can about potential new varieties, which is one of the reasons he has had SRA variety trials on his property.

"We grow most of our cane as two-year old – only cutting as one-year old if we need to manage a frost," he said. "So a new variety is then in the ground for six years, making it a long-term investment that we want to get right, and want more information on.

"We start at the mill plot, talking to the Ag Services and looking at their trials. We're looking at the trash on the varieties to keep the frost down, and of course looking at stalks for yield. Then we're also looking

at all the other information coming out on varieties and talking to other farmers to see what they have tried."

He said the variety trial helped give an insight into how new varieties might work on his farm, and it was also useful for the district to gather information on a range of farms and conditions.

These trials are led in the region by SRA Variety Officer, Anthony Cattle, and with the help of Bundaberg-based Senior Plant Breeder, Roy Parfitt. Roy is SRA's plant breeder for the Southern Region as well as Rocky Point and NSW.

Keith's son, Scott, said that they were looking for varieties that stood up to frost and had good two-year performance.

"We regularly get into the negative temperatures and have lost a fair bit of cane to frost over the years," he said. "We are looking to replace some of the older varieties like BN83-3120 with newer varieties, looking for similar vigour and durability."

They grow varieties such as Q208<sup>®</sup>, Q240<sup>®</sup>, Q254<sup>®</sup>, Q183<sup>®</sup> and Q232<sup>®</sup>.

They grow cane on about 120 hectares, with two farms with variable conditions in relation to frost and flood. Floods and wet harvests are often a challenge.

Last year, the first three rounds presented a smooth run, but the fourth round saw them confront about 240mm of rain

over a couple of weeks in October. This created plenty of headaches for ground management, and also saw them need to replant about 18 hectares, which had just finished going in as the first storm rolled over and the rain started.

"We had Rick Beattie from the Ag Services here digging each paddock to look at the cane. It had no roots, the eyes were black, and smelt like vinegar when we cut it open. In 45 years of farming I've seen plenty of wet weather but have never had cane not come up," Keith said. "So we replanted the lot, and heading into late summer it has gotten terribly dry."

For the Broadwater mill area, the 2018 crop averaged 127t/ha for the two-year cane (121t/ha in 2017) and 90t/ha for the one-year cane (83t/ha for 2017). The mill area harvested just over 767,000 tonnes with CCS at 12.21. ■

For more information on variety selection and performance, check out the 2018/19 Variety Guides on the SRA website [www.sugarresearch.com.au/sra-information/publications](http://www.sugarresearch.com.au/sra-information/publications)

*(Above) Keith Robinson checks over his cane earlier this year.*