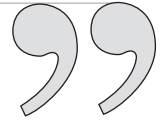




NRM investments in better farm management practices to cane growers across Queensland total more than \$2.5 million.

Joe Russo, CANEGROWERS Senior Vice-Chairman



Results driven by partnerships between growers & NRM groups

Cane growers have taken up a range of incentive based projects over the past five years, aimed at promoting better farm management practices. This has been a partnership between growers and regional natural resource management groups.

Four regional NRM bodies have worked closely with the sugarcane industry along the Queensland reef catchments and provided incentives to all agricultural industries.

Investments to cane growers in the four regions totalled more than \$2.5 million.



sweeteners

- ▷ Projects included stool splitters for better fertiliser management in conjunction with variable rate spreaders and GPS for controlled traffic.
- ▷ Improved chemical application rates resulted from the purchase of hooded spray equipment, improved fertiliser equipment both for cane and legumes, sediment traps, minimum tillage equipment and controlled traffic.
- ▷ Growers purchased enviroscans and trickle irrigation systems for improved irrigation efficiency.

A summary of some of the incentive programs being run by four of the regional NRM bodies in cane growing regions are presented below.

Terrain NRM which covers the Wet Tropics from the Herbert River in the south to the Daintree River in the north provided cash incentives over the three years 2006/2008 of \$262,000 to cane growers in the north.



Terrain also provided incentive funding to dairy, cattle, and fruit and vegetable growers in the region. Investments by cane growers, both in cash and in-kind, totalled \$465,000, giving a total investment of \$727,000. The program was supported by 50 growers over the three years.

These funds contributed to improved chemical application rates with the purchase of hooded spray equipment, improved fertiliser equipment both for cane and legumes, sediment traps, minimum tillage equipment and controlled traffic support among others. ▶

Reef Catchments 'Sustainable Landscapes' program in Mackay Whitsunday has supported 194 projects over the last three years in the sugarcane industry. The focus was on enhanced precision agricultural uptake with funding support for hooded chemical sprays, stool splitters for better fertiliser management in conjunction with variable rate spreaders and GPS's for controlled traffic update.



Over \$980,000 was provided by the program with another \$1.2 million investment by cane growers in the region. Over \$170,000 was provided to build recycle pits, \$545,000 was provided for the construction of 46 wetlands for sediment and nutrient capture as well providing enhanced habitat value in farm.

Mary Burnett Regional Group has also provided over \$500,000 in support of grower initiatives in nutrient management training, irrigation efficiencies, recycle pits, hooded sprayers among others. Grower's contributions exceeded



\$1 million.

Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM's 'Lower Burdekin Water Improvement Tender' used a market based approach to provided funding of \$605,800 for growers to bid for water quality outcomes in 2007/2008. The 33 cane growers who were funded provided an additional \$890,000 of cash and in-kind. Another 45 growers submitted proposals to be part of this program but because of limited funding only half were able to be supported. The Reef Rescue program has targeted a larger number of growers who would be eligible for the incentives and these growers will be able to use these funds from 2008 to 2013.



The tender gave incentive for growers to install recycle pits, switch to shielded sprayers for better chemical application, use stool splitters for sub-surface fertiliser application, conduct electromagnetic mapping to distinguish soil type and adopt variable rate fertiliser application, purchase enviroscans and trickle irrigation systems for improved irrigation efficiency, upgrade farm machinery to GPS control traffic & minimum till, and adopt break-cropping practices with the purchase of legume planters. It has been predicted that these activities will prevent 101,976 kg in nitrogen and 59 kg in residual pesticide entering the GBR lagoon. ■

growers get GPS benefits via contract planting ▶▶▶

case study

Cane growers can get most of the benefits of GPS by having the planting done by a contractor.

Richard Zunker of Redtrail Farming Pty Ltd was one of the first Bundaberg contractors to invest in GPS and auto-steer technology. "Our initial investment was driven by the tender requirements of Bundaberg Sugar for their contract planting," says Mr Zunker.

With a mobile base station the Zunkers use GPS guidance to plant around 500 ha a year – 350 ha on Bundaberg Sugar plantations and the remainder on their own and other growers' farms. With two tractors kitted out the Zunkers can easily plant 10-15 ha per day.

"We are looking at installing GPS in our harvester and haul outs," says Mr Zunker. "At \$50-60,000 each they are still expensive. As most damage at harvesting is done by the haul-outs we would like to have the whole package."

"Other contractors in the area are trialling yield monitors in harvesters and variable rate fertiliser application and we are very interested in their progress. I'm not convinced that the technology is fully reliable yet but it is definitely something for the future."

Tony Linedale from Bundaberg Sugar Services said that unless a grower was doing a high number of tractor hours, GPS was probably not economical. "But these growers can still get most of the benefits simply by having the planting done by a contractor using GPS," says Mr Linedale. "We are encouraging growers to do this so they can make the most of other farming practices they are implementing." ■

sweeteners

- ▶ Contractors are trialling yield monitors in harvesters and variable rate fertiliser application.
- ▶ Growers can get most of the benefits simply by having the planting done by a contractor using GPS.



"On our own farms we use the GPS for all field operations. Being able to watch the implement rather than watching where you are going is an important benefit," says Mr Zunker.

"Once the GPS data is recorded we can bring up the block information and use it for a variety of things including costings."