

Mossman/Tableland

April is here already and to date the weather has been kind to us. The wet season arrived later than usual, however the northern crop has generally handled the dry start pretty well. For the first 3 months of this year the Mossman region received around 1320mm of rain. The January total for 2015 was 243mm, February's total was 538.5mm and the March total was 538.5mm. With the recent rain and at times wild winds associated with TC Nathan there appears to be small areas of lodged cane. These areas are very isolated and I expect it to have a minimal effect to the 2015 crop. With the cyclone season drawing to an end and a relatively dry summer, the crop in all the northern areas is looking like an average season.

In 2015, Mossman Mill is again aiming to start this year's crush in mid-May and the Mossman region's chance of a reasonable crop appears very likely with the crop estimate coming in around 1,255,000t (including the Tablelands). A reminder to all farmers that their estimates along with any map correction should be sent back to the Mossman Mill field staff as soon as possible.

Local farmers are also eager for some dry weather so they can start their planting programs; to date there has not been any early planting carried out. Growers are reminded that before they intend to plant, to please contact their local Productivity Board for a plant source inspection. For an accurate reading it can take a few weeks for the results, so please give your field officer plenty of notice before you intend to plant.

As most of you may be aware, I am the current Next Gen Officer for the entire Australian Sugar Industry. The Next Gen program's aim is to facilitate and encourage an active network of young and established farmers in each mill region. Since I have started this role I have undertaken annual road trips from Mossman to Harwood in the NSW and travelled over 35,000 km. On these journeys through the industry I have had the privilege of meeting many innovative farmers, both young and old. I have found these meetings very productive, the feedback very encouraging and I am sure that the sugar industry has a Sweet Future. Being able to meet with fellow farmers from different regions and talk to them on their relevant issues and even their current farming practices has been very exciting for me.

In March The Next Gen team had the pleasure of hosting the second Case IH Step up conference, which was held at Hotel Grand Chancellor in Palm Cove, Cairns. More than 160 cane farmers, cane professionals and industry stakeholders met at the Case IH Step UP Conference to discuss the future of the Australian sugar industry.

The conference aimed to build on the Next Gen program's established network of young and established cane farmers across Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Of the delegates that attended, around 120 were younger farmers and they were able to identify and address topics such as best farming practice; precision farming; sugar marketing; R&D; agricultural engineering & technology; and financial products and planning. The main themes of the conference focused on sustainability, profitability and innovation and speakers from our industry were able to talk to farmers about the real issues which weigh heavily on them.

The Next gen program wants to encourage younger people to Step Up and take more of an industry role. All in all it was a very exciting conference; I hope that Industry and the Next Gen Team can continue to have the chance to show our support for Next Generation farmers in our industry.

Gerard Puglisi
Northern Director