



The Australian Cane Farmer

Leading farmers into the future

Farewell Floyd, we'll miss you



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On January 12 ACFA lost its founding father with the passing of Floyd Fowler on January 12.

Floyd was instrumental in establishing ACFA after the millers split from the Australian Sugar Producers Association in 1987.

He served as the organization's inaugural Chairman and gave the keynote address when the company celebrated its 100th birthday in 2007.

Floyd is survived by his two brothers and sister; his wife of 58 years, Jean; his two daughters, Christine and Isabel; his son, Kent and 12 grandchildren.

Chairman's Comment

Row over reef regulation continues



On behalf of ACFA I would like to extend my empathy to all farmers who have been affected by the floods in North Queensland.

The final cost to the industry will be great and farmers can rest assured ACFA will work with Government to ensure adequate provisions are put in place until the industry is on its feet again.

The Great Barrier Reef has received a lot of attention in the media in recent months. Agricultural and grazing industries have been targeted by environmental lobby groups and the Queensland Government has come out with tough talk about impending new regulation.

Yes, there is an election on the horizon and lobby groups and Governments are out to win the support and hearts of voters.

Mrs Bligh said "By June I will have in my hand tough new legislation squarely aimed at improving water quality on our Reef."

"The science is clear. The Reef's health is suffering long-term decline from soil, fertilisers and pesticides washing from the mainland...Unless we take action now, the Reef will be dead within 40 years," said Mrs Bligh.

It's time for environmental groups and the Queensland Government to abandon their emotive approach and concentrate on working with farmers on environmental issues, rather than subjecting them to trial by media.

Everyone on the planet leaves an environmental footprint and farmers are no different. Every person when they drive to work, catch a train, live in a house, mow the lawn or use electricity effect the environment. Farmers of course do things on a larger scale, so we are a larger target.

It is up to each and every farmer to encourage his or her neighbour to join in best practice programs and jointly improve their environmental credentials. The vast majority of farmers do the right thing and their sustainability is more closely related to the environment than anyone else.

Nearly all reports say the Great Barrier Reef is in good condition but there are pockets where an effect can be measured. Farmers are striving to be good environmental managers but there are many unknowns. This in many cases is working against farmers and more knowledge and understanding is required. When facts are clear good outcomes can be achieved.

Farmers are happy to work with Governments and environmental groups to achieve good outcomes for all parties. More can be done by all parties but it must be based on fact and in good faith. Any other agendas will stifle and detract from best outcomes.

The Australian sugar industry has to compete on the corrupt world market and support, like that the Federal Government is providing, will be successful in improving outcomes. All Governments around the world are providing support to farmers to manage environmental issues and with the Great Barrier Reef offshore it is essential more support is provided to farmers and to achieve a better understanding of causes and remedies.

ACFA pays tribute to an industry legend - Floyd Fowler

The following is brief biography of Floyd Fowler that was kindly provided by his son Kent. As you'll see, Floyd lived a remarkable life. He was a kind and gentle man who was dedicated to his church and his family. He was also a tireless servant of the sugar industry who fought hard for farmers.

Floyd grew up on the family farm during the depression years. They didn't have any luxuries but ate well as his father George always had chooks, turkeys, milking cows and a large vegetable garden and fruit trees. There was no electricity in the early days and therefore no refrigeration. Floyd recounted gnawing on four-day-old bread.

Floyd didn't like horses. I always assumed it was because he had to plod along behind the southern end of the north bound horse when ploughing. I found out it was the fact he had to feed the horses as a youngster.

The older brother passed his job to the younger brother and he didn't have anyone to pass the chore onto he much preferred the horse power.

Because of his passion for farming, at the age of 14 he decided to come back to the farm to work for his father. His father told him he would not pay wages but would feed and clothe him and give him pocket money like his two brothers but would get gifted $\frac{1}{4}$ share of the farms. This happened when he was 21.

During the war years when Japan bombed Pearl harbour and invaded Malaysia and Singapore the Americans invaded Australia. The Yanks had a strange idea they should be fed because they were on our side.

The Fowlers two farms were chosen to be part of the Commonwealth Vegetable Farms. Then, around 1942, the Women's Land Army invaded to work the farms - all 70 of them. Although only a maximum of 35 worked on the Fowler farms, at the age of 17 Dad was appointed foreman of works.

Personal management was learnt very quickly.

From an early age Floyd attended Osborne Sunday School and church. Floyd also was involved with church picnics, choir, church worship and held every leadership position in the Methodist Church except for senior circuit steward and president of the Ladies Guild. In the Uniting Church he held the positions of elder, lay preacher, parish secretary, was on the property board and did many odd jobs behind the scenes unknown to many people. When the church hall was burnt he was off-sider for the demolition crew and overseer for the construction for the new hall. All he did was not for his own glory but for the glory of God.

At a church picnic in 1946, Floyd met a young woman by the name of Jean Clark. They became friends and this friendship blossomed into romance and they became engaged in 1948 and married in June 12th 1950. They came to live on the farm on what later became Fowler Road and in 1952 their first child, a girl Christine Ann was born. Another daughter followed in 1954, Isabel Kay and finally in 1957 a son Kent George. Floyd was a loving father.

Floyd was always involved in many sugar industry innovations. In 1950, Fowler and sons along with the Bapty's bought the first Perry cane harvester and Toft loader in the Burdekin. The loader worked but the harvester didn't work very well in the larger Burdekin crops. Floyd also was involved in billet planting and laser levelling. In 1954 his

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ACFA pays tribute to Floyd Fowler

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father retired and now he had his own farm which he paid off by 1957. He set about saving and by 1972 was able to buy a second farm and then in 1978 bought two properties across the river at Mona Park.

Floyd was involved in Sugar Industry representation with the Australian Sugar Producers Association (ASPA) in 1961 and attended every conference to the split in 1987. The Australian Cane Farmers Association (ACFA) was formed from the grower members. Floyd was appointed the inaugural chairman of the new formed ACFA and set about launching the organisation and establishing its credibility.

The formative years were difficult but with dedication and sincerity displayed by my father through his life the ACFA became a creditable farmer representative organisation.

He remained chairman until his retirement at the 1995 conference. He was privileged to deliver the keynote speech at the 100 year celebration in Ayr in 2007. He has remained a keen supporter of the ACFA right up to his final days.

Floyd was involved in many community groups over many years such as P and C associations, scouts, choral society, blue

nursing collection and recently on the formation committee for the community bank.

He viewed his community involvement as a way in which he could witness for the Lord. He didn't want recognition for himself; in fact he avoided any awards if he could. To find his name on the plaque on the wall outside recognising his labour contribution to the construction effort of the new church hall was quite a surprise.

This is only a brief snap shot of nearly 84 years. There are many more stories, but we don't have the time to go into more depth of what has been a full life of achievement and service. He will be sadly missed by us all.

ACFA Chairman Ross Walker had this to say about Floyd Fowler.

"There would be no ACFA if it wasn't for the efforts of Floyd Fowler."

"Floyd's contribution to the sugar industry has been immeasurable and all farmers owe a debt of gratitude to him that can never be repaid."

"On behalf of the Australian sugar industry I take this opportunity to thank Floyd for his contribution to this industry and send our deepest sympathies to his family and friends."

Farmers battle floods in the North

Queensland's sugar industry is still reeling from flooding rains that have submerged much of the industry's crop.

The Far North, Herbert and the Burdekin regions are still battling flood waters that will no doubt cause significant crop damage this coming season.

The Herbert has borne the brunt of the damage with many hectares of cane still under water.

Farmers are praying for some sunshine to allow flood waters to ease and so the crop

can continue growing.

It is expected that there will be extensive crop damage throughout much of the Herbert and farmers will suffer financial losses because of this.

Infrastructure will also be damaged resulting in increased repair costs for millers and farmers.

ACFA Chairman Ross Walker said the rest of the industry was deeply sympathetic

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Farmers battle northern floods

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towards the plight of farmers in the north and far north of Queensland.

"Farmers are used to battling the elements but the recent floods have come as a cruel blow to farmers after a promising start to their season," said Mr Walker.

"My heart goes out to all in the Burdekin, Herbert and Far North whose livelihoods are threatened because these floods," he said.

"Any farmers looking for support are welcome to contact ACFA and we'll point you in the right direction."

It is estimated that 2,900 homes in Ingham are flood damaged.

The true cost of the damage to houses and crops won't be able to be assessed for some time.

More than 62 per cent of Queensland - over a million square kilometres - has been affected by floods so far this year. The damage bill is expected to top \$200 million.

Flood waters inundating the streets of Ingham.



The Road to Hawkins Creek in Ingham is shown here, partially underwater.

Farmers battle northern floods



This photograph was taken in the Johnstone area in Far North Queensland at about 6pm on February 6.

Another photograph from the Johnstone area.



This photograph shows the Burdekin Dam in flood.

Stephen Michael Hetherington



Stephen Michael Hetherington, 69 years, was fatally injured in a tractor rollover last December 15th.

The photograph chosen shows Stephen in the early Seventies smiling from the seat of his then favourite haulout.

To see him on his Chamberlain as the Moore Park Co-op's spare man last season, you would not have seen any different.

All of the farming community has had a deal of difficulty coping with this loss as Stephen was tireless in his efforts to be a good neighbour and friend to all his farming mates.

Stephen's farming life began at Farnsfield in 1950, when he accompanied his father, Mick, to Childers to open up land in the Soldiers Settlement.

He took up land in the 1962 expansion and farmed and contracted his harvesters and crawler tractors around the district for many years.

In 2000, a sea change took him to Moore Park where he met many new neighbours and changed some of his farming practices.

He often said he liked the company but remarked 'does this wind always have to keep blowing?'

Stephen is the brother ACFA Southern Region Director Michael Hetherington.

Michael said Stephen would want us to get on with things, work co-operatively, stand up for ourselves as rural people but never forget time for family and friends.

ACFA extends its sympathies to the Hetherington family during this difficult time.

QSL announces new board

Mr Alan Winney, Chairman of the newly constituted board of Queensland Sugar Limited (QSL) recently announced that three further appointments have now been made to the QSL Board, and that the restructured Board is operative from 1 January 2009. In June 2008, QSL Members approved changes to the constitution as part of the restructure of QSL and its export marketing arrangements for most of Queensland's raw sugar exports. Under these changes to the constitution, a Board Selection Committee of two representatives elected by grower members and two representatives elected by mill owner members was established to appoint a smaller independent Board as part of the restructure.

In addition to Mr Winney whose appointment was announced on 20 November 2008, the Board Selection Committee with the assistance of an international search firm has appointed **Nicole Birrell**, **Guy Cowan** and **Mark Sage** to the Board.

Nicole Birrell has over 25 years experience in wholesale and investment banking in Australia and the UK. She has expertise in the strategic management of operational risk in financial markets operations, including systems risk and insurance management and financial markets compliance issues. Nicole is currently a member of the boards of Wheat Exports Australia, Grains Research and Development Corporation, SMS Management and Technology Ltd, and Superpartners Pty Ltd.

Guy Cowan has nine years' experience as a chartered accountant with Price Waterhouse (now PricewaterhouseCoopers) and KPMG in addition to 23 years international experience in commercial and finance roles in the oil and gas industry. Prior to February 2005 he was CFO of Shell Oil in the USA. In February 2005 Guy joined the Fonterra Co-operative Group Limited, the New Zealand-based world leading exporter of dairy products accounting for more than one third of the

international dairy trade. At Fonterra, as Chief Financial Officer, his responsibilities include all aspects of foreign currency, interest rate and liquidity risk management as well as business planning, financial and performance reporting and M and A. Guy is stepping down from his Fonterra role and will shortly be relocating his professional activities to Australia.

Mark Sage has held senior line and functional executive positions in large public companies up until 2003. During this time Mark gained extensive international experience in both retail and commodity markets in Asia, the Middle East and Pacific regions and brings expertise to the Board in export marketing roles, logistics and as a trader in commodity markets. Mark was Export Marketing Manager with CSR building materials division and his senior positions include Managing Director, International and Group HR Director with Goodman Fielder Ltd.

Mr Winney noted that the new Board faced a number of key challenges including the preservation of a strong single face to the market for the export of the bulk raw sugar, the development of new products to send clear price signals to cane farmers and sugar producers, and the delivery of ongoing operational improvements to maximise returns to its suppliers in the current competitive environment.

Mr Winney said that "As part of the revised arrangements, the previous QSL Board, which comprised grower and miller Directors as well as independents, has completed its term and the Directors stepped down on 31 December 2008."

ACFA Chairman Ross Walker wished the new board well but urged them not to forget about the farmers who built the company from scratch.

"QSL's future will now be controlled by non-stakeholders and it is important they do not forget about the hard working farmers on whom this company rests," he said.

ACFA calls for Director Nominations

As per section 36 of the Australian Cane Farmers Association constitution *Term of appointment.*

No director shall hold office for a period in excess of four (4) years or until the fourth Annual General Meeting following that director's appointment (whichever is the longer period) without submitting himself or herself for re-election.

ACFA is now calling for nominations for the election of one (1) Director per region in each of the Northern, Burdekin and NSW Regions and two (2) Directors in the Central Region.

Director positions currently held by John Blackensee, Margaret Menzel, Ross Walker and Wayne Rodgers will become vacant this year.

Members of the company from the Northern, Burdekin, Central and NSW Regions only are able to nominate for the director position in their region. John Blackensee, Margaret Menzel, Ross Walker and Wayne Rodgers are eligible to renominate for this position. A second Director is sought for the Central Region.

You must be a member of the company to participate in the election of ACFA Directors.

If you would like to nominate someone for the position of ACFA Director, please complete the enclosed nomination form (including signature of nominee) and return it to ACFA offices by the closing date of 20th March 2009.

Membership and Nomination forms can be downloaded from the ACFA Web site or call 1800 500 025 for further assistance.

SRDC Update

Robert Troedson announces his retirement from SRDC

Soon the SRDC will say farewell to Robert Troedson who will retire after 11½ years as Program manager and Investment portfolio manager.

During his time at the SRDC, Robert managed a portfolio of projects in crop agronomy, plant improvement and biotechnology.

In recent years he became responsible for coordinating the entire investment portfolio, project selection and management processes, as well as communications with government stakeholders.

SRDC Executive Director Dr Frikkie Botha said, Robert has played a vital role in searching and selecting the 'best' researchers to undertake critical projects to support sugarcane industry development.

"All at SRDC have benefited from Robert's willingness to share his extensive knowledge and true understanding of the industry," Dr Botha said.

"Robert should leave the SRDC feeling a sense of achievement and success for his vital contribution to both Government and industry".

SRDC innovation awards open

The search for the top innovators in the Australian sugarcane industry is on again. Nominations are now open for the 2009 Sugar Research and Development Corporation Innovation Awards - the sugarcane industry's premier awards to recognise research innovation and innovative thinkers.

SRDC Chairman Ian Knop said innovation is critical for the long-term sustainability of the industry and the SRDC annually reward individuals and groups that play a leading role in promoting innovative thinking.

"There are many individuals and groups of like-minded people who make a significant contribution towards the use of technologies and practices that drive the Australian sugarcane industry, these are people who embrace change and these are the people that we want to recognise and showcase," Mr Knop said.

"Innovation is critical for the long-term sustainability of the industry, so it's important we all take the time to recognise the men and women who play a leading role in promoting innovative thinking," he said.

The SRDC Innovation Award offers a \$15,000 prize and a perpetual trophy. This award recognises contributions by teams where a significant benefit has already been delivered to the Australian sugarcane industry.

A GIS knowledge sharing enterprise, based in the Herbert River catchment area, won the 2008 award. The selection panel all agreed that this enterprise recognised the future of sugarcane farming is in precision agriculture and has met the challenges of resourcing the industry with a comprehensive geographical information system by forming local partnerships and building capacity through knowledge sharing within the community."

The SRDC Research and Development Award offers a \$3,000 prize to reward outstanding achievement by an individual in research and development in the last five years. The award acknowledges the contribution that the winner has made to the Australian sugarcane industry with their commitment to excellence in their own, their team's or peers' R&D capability and is designed to provide the winner with an opportunity to further their professional development.

Last year James Cook University lecturer Dr Yvette Everingham took up the award for her work in seasonal climate forecasting. The SRDC Service Award, offers a \$3,000

SRDC Update

prize, for individual excellence in the advancement of innovative R and D within the Australian sugarcane industry.

Judges will be looking for someone who has shown sustained leadership in influencing innovative R and D through management, policy development and or promotional activities.

The 2008 award was presented to Indonesian Sugar Research Institute plant pathologist Irawan for his years of dedication to a collaborative project to screen Australian varieties of sugarcane for resistance to smut and disease prevention.

"The 2009 SRDC Innovation Awards presents an ideal opportunity for us to profile and acknowledge those people with a 'can do' attitude and a real commitment to fostering change within our industry," said Mr Knop.

Nominations close 20 March 2009 and the awards will be presented at the Australian Society of Sugar Cane Technologists conference in Ballina from 5th to 8th May 2009.

Nomination forms and guidelines about the awards are available from www.srdc.gov.au or email your questions to Srdc@srdc.gov.au

An integrated approach to nutgrass control

Nutgrass is a significant weed problem for many cane farmers and is particularly prevalent in parts of the northern NSW sugar industry.

Cyperus rotundus and *Cyperus esculentus*, two species of nutgrass, compete with newly planted cane causing poor germination and reduced growth of young plants and ratoon crops.

Previous attempts to control nutgrass

outbreaks had been ad hoc with no structured package available to growers for satisfactory control.

Recognising this problem, the Sugar Research and Development Corporation invested in a research project led by BSES Senior Extension Officer, Dr Bob Aitken and NSW farmer Alan Munro.

The aim of the project was to develop guidelines for nutgrass control resulting in a grower decision support package.

The project also involves increasing the knowledge of options available for nutgrass control and the cost benefit of different control options.

Observations from plant cane trial sites to demonstrate nutgrass effects on plant cane yield were established in late 2007 on trial sites in NSW. Dr Bob Aitken said nut grass had a significant effect on cane shoot numbers with approximately a 40% reduction in plant cane shoot numbers in plots where nutgrass had not been controlled.

"Results indicate that even allowing the nutgrass to go uncontrolled for a few weeks has a significant effect on yield," Dr Aitken said.

"The magnitude of the yield reductions recorded were similar at multiple sites with a 27% yield loss in plots where nutgrass was allowed to grow uncontrolled compared to nutgrass free plots."

The large yield reductions were recorded in a season in which the rainfall was in excess of the long term average rainfall. It is probable that even larger yield reductions would have been recorded had soil moisture regimes been less optimal, leading to a bigger competition effect from the nutgrass.

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QSL Market Update

by Cally Wilson, Queensland Sugar Limited

The March 2009 contract opened January at US 11.81 c/lb and strengthened over the month even as crude and CRB values fell over the same period.

The expected re-weighting by the funds did not deter the upwards movement of the sugar market, with the March 2009 contract reaching highs not seen since early October 2008.

The ICE No.11 March 2009 contract settled at US 12.59 c/lb at time of writing, falling slightly in the past two days.

Mr Alan Winney, Chairman of the newly constituted board of Queensland Sugar Ltd (QSL) announced on Tuesday 6th January that three further appointments have now been made to the QSL Board, and that the restructured Board is operative from 1 January 2009.

In addition to Mr Winney whose appointment was announced on 20 November 2008, the Board Selection Committee with the assistance of an international search firm has appointed Nicole Birrell, Guy Cowan and Mark Sage to the Board.

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biomass with, on average, a 33% yield reduction. When data from all three sites were combined for statistical analysis there was a significant effect of nutgrass on both biomass and millable stalk numbers. A pre-project survey indicated that 40% of growers across the three NSW mill areas perceived nutgrass to be a problem mainly in plant cane and not in ratoons.

NSW cane farmer Alan Munro said, the consistent, large yield losses caused by nutgrass in ratoon cane highlights the importance of structured control methods. "The magnitude of yield losses during the

For further details please refer to Queensland Sugar's media announcement which can be found on our website at www.qldsugar.com.

Brazilian sugar production should rise in the 2009/10 sugarcane crop season, while the production of ethanol should rise at a slower rate, according to Dow Jones.

"Brazil's total sugar production will rise to 34.7 million metric tonnes from the 2009/10 sugarcane crop, compared to 31.5 million tonnes in 2008/09," stated Plinio Nastari, Director of consultancy firm Datagro.

Of the total, Nastari said 29.6 million tonnes of sugar will come from Brazil's main centre-south sugarcane region in 2009/10 compared to 26.6 million tonnes of sugar from the previous crop.

The rest will come from the northeast of Brazil. Brazil's sugar production will be stimulated by higher prices due to the tight global supply of sugar.

The Australian dollar (AUD) began January over AUD/USD 0.70 before falling over the month to the mid sixties, trading between AUD/USD 0.7233 - 0.6457 (1 Jan - 29 Jan).

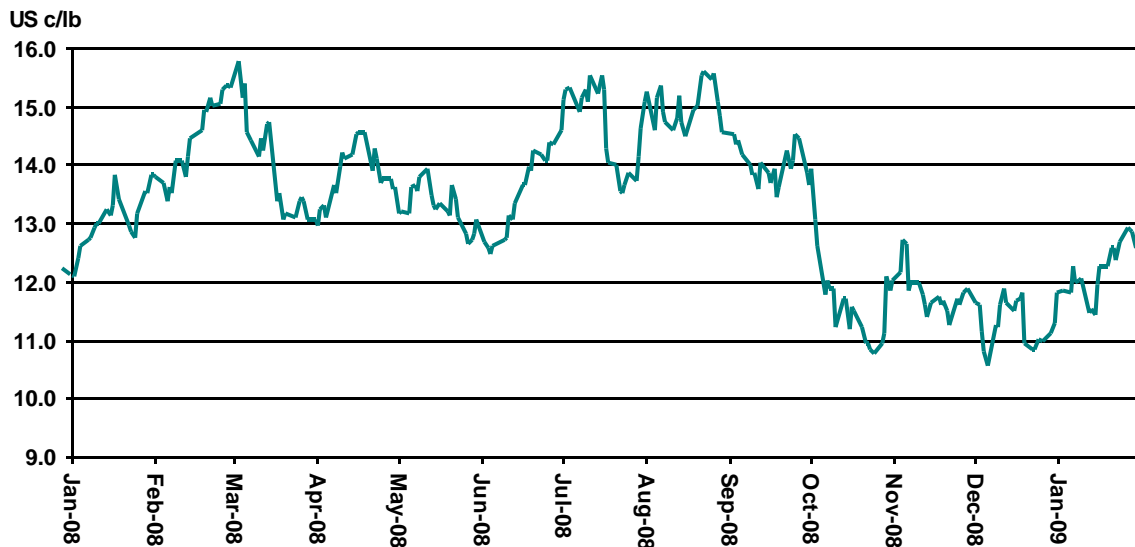
trials was a surprise to the grower group undertaking this project," Mr Munro said. "Without this new knowledge, many growers would have only considered nutgrass a problem in plant cane without treating ratoons."

The project will run until August 2010 and will also assess the effect of different herbicides on nutgrass tuber density and viability as part of the trial work being conducted. **For information contact Dr Bob Aitken, BSES Senior Extension Officer on 02 6640 0400 or raitken@bses.org.au or Bianca Boseley, SRDC Investment Manager on 07 3225 9415.**

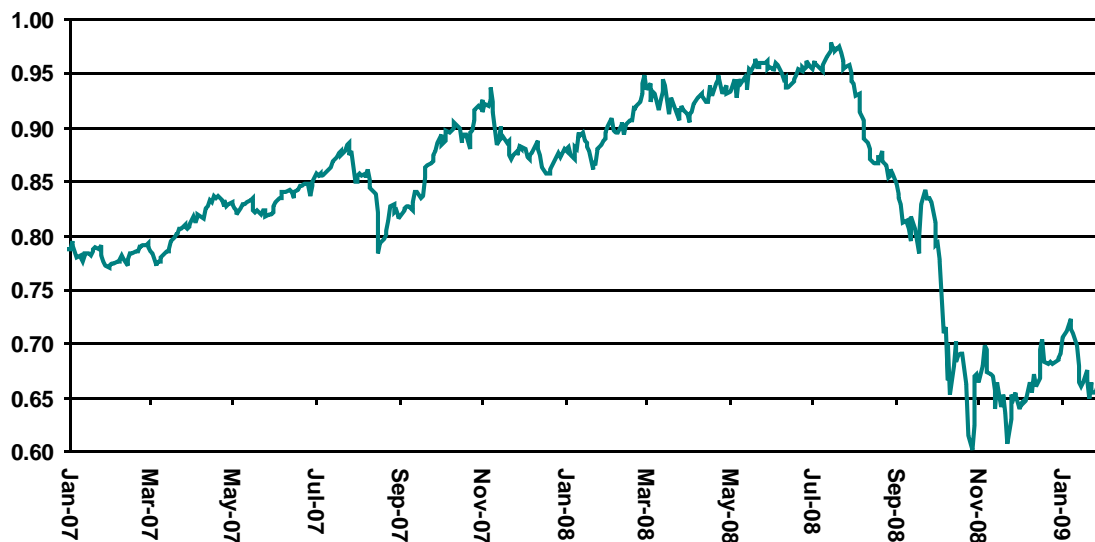
QSL Market Update

by Cally Wilson, Queensland Sugar Limited

ICE No.11 Raw Sugar Futures Prompt Contract Price



AUD/USD



A Nasty Surprise in the Free Gelato

Likely you heard in the media of the beachside hotel where a family was served free gelato, after the family had complained about staff attitude, prices etc.

A family member was ill after eating the dessert. Subsequent testing of the dessert has suggested some properties similar to human excreta.

As well as being newsworthy, that situation raises some important legal questions about liabilities of an employer and of employees for actions that cause loss or damage to a third person.

An employer is usually liable vicariously for the wrongful actions of an employee where

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A nasty surprise in the free gelato

...from previous page

that causes loss to another person or organisation, if the actions were within the course of the employment.

As well as enduring a loss of reputation, the hotel employer here is at risk of legal action by its customers. There is also a risk of prosecution under food safety legislation.

Whilst the legal system generally protects an employer from seeking contribution from an employee, the protection does not extend to wilful misconduct by an employee, and so sometimes an employee can be found personally liable for the loss or damage.

Whether blame is so assigned will depend on various factors, including the steps/measures taken by the employer to manage the way things are done within the workplace.

Irrespective, the message is clear – employers should take steps to control risks by taking measures such as:

Clearly explaining in workplace policy the standards of behaviour and customer service expected in the workplace.

Explaining the policy standards to staff.

Empowering managers to supervise and performance manage to maintain the standards.

A prudent employer will also carry out good commercial “housekeeping” by reviewing its insurance coverage, and taking advice on its asset structure and asset allocation.

Taking these actions will help reduce the risks for your business, and moderate the damage if a situation of concern does arise.

This newsletter is for the general information of McKays' clients and associates.

The information contained in the newsletter should not be relied upon without first consulting us and obtaining specific advice.

Provided by McKays Solicitors

Regional Reports

Innisfail Report

The weather has been hot and humid as we feel the effects of Cyclone Charlotte in the gulf.

The North Tropical Coast felt strong winds and heavy rain that caused minor flooding in all areas.

Little damage has resulted from the monsoonal activity and the crop is continuing to power on in the moist, hot and humid conditions.

At this stage of growth the crop is looking to above average production but this is still early days.

Final sprayings of the crop are being

completed before paddocks become too wet. Farmers are commenting on the vine growth which appears to be more prolific than in previous years.

As reported in previous editions, Smut is now active in all areas and farmers are being reminded that now is the perfect time for the disease to be detected.

If you spot anything, do the right thing and inform proper authorities.

The World Wildlife Fund claims farmers are damaging the reef and are calling on the Government to legislate farming practices.

Farmers are sick and tired of being made scapegoats in trial by media.

Regional Reports

John Blanckensee
Innisfail Director

Herbert Report

Before the floods struck, the New Year was off to a good start with tropical downpours, storms and extremely humid conditions.

Rain had been constant over the district with some areas being inundated with more rain than needed.

Parts of Ingham had quite strong winds from the Tropical Low. Cane was flattened and in some cases broken off.

A forum was held in Ingham on the 16th January, 2009. The topic was Natural Silica for Sugar Cane Farming.

The forum was presented by Si- SOIL, the guest speaker was Dr. Vladimir Matichenkov a Senior Scientific Officer from the Russian Academy of Science. Dr. Matichenkov specializes in plant and soil biology and has been researching in this area since 1981.

He is considered to be one of the world's leading experts and is widely sought after as a researcher and consultant in the agricultural industry.

We were extremely fortunate to have this rare opportunity to listen to a man of this calibre.

Dr. Matichenkov has undertaken extensive research in many countries Russia, USA, Spain, Ecuador, England, Saudi Arabia and Australia to name just a few and is at the forefront of the latest and best farming technologies in the world.

Topics discussed were

- § Plant Nutrition
- § Soil Fertility and Health
- § Yield/Production Increases
- § Disease Control
- § Insect/Pest Control

§ Sustainability

Dr. Matichenkov addressed farmers in Innisfail and Ingham while he was in Australia.

He will be coming back to Australia in March and will have a laboratory at James Cook University, Cairns.

He will be working with farmers in North Queensland using Silica (Diatomaceous Earth) with regard to small crops, bananas and sugar cane for the next twelve months.

Carol Mackee
Herbert Director

Burdekin Report

In offering my first report for 2009, I would like to extend New Year's greetings and the hope that efforts for the industry will produce a more equitable result for cane farmers than recent years have done.

The first Burdekin branch meeting of the Australian Cane Farmers Association for 2009 was held on Tuesday, 10th February, at 7:30pm in the Sacred Heart Parish Hall in Edward Street, Ayr.

Agenda items included: Discussion on Mill Supply Agreements and Cane Pricing, the Cane Firing Debate and relevant issues, Proposed changes to the Trade Practices Act as well as General Business and Industry Issues.

The 2008 crushing season finished on Tuesday 16th December, 2008, with Invicta Mill being the last to complete crushing.

Final figures for the season were:

Invicta 3,012,393
Pioneer 1,264,466
Kalamia 1,606,920
Inkerman 1,760,400

The final total was 7,644,179 million tonnes

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of cane.

The District average CCS for 2008 was 14.86, with an average production of 111.3 t/ha, a further loss of 10.1 tonnes/ha of productivity for the district from the 2003 (pre-deregulation) harvest of 121.4 tonnes per hectare and 15.04 CCS.

Production losses per annum are approximately \$49,445,370 million to the district's farmers. This is based on 2003, pre-deregulation, seasonal harvest of 9,165,575 tonnes, less 2008 tonnage of 7,644,179 = 1,521,396 tonnes x current 2008 season estimate of \$32.50/tonne.

Estimated losses from the reduction of seasonal CCS, due to late finish date are in excess of an additional \$2.7 Million to the districts farmers.

The mill crush rates for 2008 plummeted to an average of 1,957 tonnes per hour, another indication of the overall reduction in performance of CSR's Burdekin Mills.

Statistics provided on **mill availability** for the 2008 season are as follows:

Kalamia: 86%
Invicta: 77%
Inkerman: 89%
Pioneer: 58%

This provides a seasonal average for the Burdekin of 77.5% mill availability, not a creditable performance.

After the fourth successive year of late finishes in the Burdekin, coinciding with the fourth year since removal of Final Offer Arbitration, the Burdekin sugar industry continues to suffer the consequences of mill supply agreements that are signed under duress.

Despite the late finishes and numerous mill breakdowns due to lack of maintenance (including the Pioneer Mill collapse), farmers received no compensation for their resultant

financial losses.

As a result, a proposed bill to amend the Trades Practices Act was presented to the Federal Minister for Primary Industries, Hon Tony Burke, in order to rectify imbalances in negotiating power and to recognise that the industry needs to be recognised as a national industry, not limited by state boundaries.

It is disappointing that with ongoing flooding and damage to crops in the district, the government's second "Stimulus Package" has again left local farmers high and dry, with no funding to progress a local ethanol industry or to share in the funds which have been attributed to farmers suffering drought only.

In proposing the 2009 maintenance and capital works in the Burdekin mills, Executive General Manager of CSR's Sugar Mills, Mark Day recognised, "the need to achieve further reliability gains" and stated, "We have also begun to implement a group-wide program to upgrade our maintenance planning processes and skills." This "will help us to take a more proactive approach to maintenance at our mills."

Invicta Mill

CSR has committed capital to improve a number of areas which will improve mill reliability including:

Tippler reliability project addressing items which had an impact on operations.

Mills Hydraulics – improving the filtration systems to reduce the failure rates on hydraulic pumps and motors.

Improvements in the steam supply systems to enable #3 Boiler to operate for longer periods between coming off line and to return to full capacity faster when resuming online.

Improvements to the Bagasse conveyor

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systems to reduce chokes and allow faster restarts from choke conditions.

Damage to the #4 Invicta bagasse conveyor caused delays in the final week of the season and it too will be replaced, along with the skirting head drum and scraper.

A project to reduce wear on the #3 Boiler drum to avoid potential reliability issues.

Large routine overhauls being carried out include:

A Shredder turbine overhauls

Boiler turbine overhauls

HG Fugal overhauls

Major capital provided to replace the ATV clarifier, Install two new Flash tanks and replace the HG Fugal receiver.

CSR has advised they have a team looking over continuous pan operations to endeavour to understand opportunities to improve pan uptime (minimise time lost to pan cleaning).

Pioneer Mill – Boiler two furnace cladding replacement

Kalamia Mill – Boiler five air heater tube replacement

Inkerman Mill – Boiler two tube replacement

Burdekin Cane Supply and Transport – Permanent restoration works on Expedition Pass and Landers Creek bridges (to commence after the wet season and into the 2009 crushing season), four loco engine upgrades.

CSR Sugar Grower and Community Relations General Manager, John Pratt advised that, “Annual routine maintenance items will also be completed in this period, utilising a new asset management methodology to prioritise, plan and schedule

the maintenance processes.

This project (RACE) is being led by a team including experienced experts from the USA (from a company called Strategic Asset Management Inc. – SAMI.”

Further work on district mills will be advised as it comes to hand.

While growers recognise the efforts by local CSR workers to get the mills and damaged transport infrastructure back on line in 2008, the channel of command from Sydney has suffered a serious disconnect from the reality of mill operations on the ground and effective maintenance programs.

A serious overhaul of operations and ongoing provision and effective application of funding to avoid the catastrophic and near catastrophic breakdowns that 2008 (and past seasons) have delivered, is long overdue.

It should have been no surprise that a disaster of the magnitude of the Pioneer collapse would happen, given the previous history of mill breakdowns and scrimping on maintenance funding from the south.

As we enter the final year of a three year maintenance program, we should expect trouble-free performance from the CSR mills during the 2009 season and an early finish.

Cane Firing

Once again, the meeting scheduled for February 10th, with the State Minister for Primary Industries on the cane firing issue has been cancelled and is to be rescheduled.

It is disappointing that with the cabinet meetings held in Townsville in February, the Minister could not have made some arrangements to re-schedule the meeting during that time.

These delays render any proposal to

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legislate on the issue as inappropriate, given the lack of input allowed from this sector of the industry to date.

Both Max Menzel and Bruno Sartori were successful in meeting Minister Mulherin, on a directive from Premier Bligh, after Max addressed the public forum during the cabinet visit in Townsville.

The Premier acknowledged that a review of the industry since deregulation was overdue and they would look at how the industry had been affected and was performing since 2003.

Productivity

BPS, besides its regular pest and disease management activities, is conducting its annual survey with all Burdekin farmers.

As part of the federal government's voluntary Reef Rescue program, this year's survey includes not only the usual gathering of plant source information, it also seeks to record – for benchmarking purposes, and to show current good practice – nutrient and herbicide usage in both plant and ratoon cane, and the use of new sustainable farming systems to date.

Future surveys will record any later improvements.

Applications for the second round of Reef Rescue funding are expected to be called for in March/April, subject to the funding being available.

The PMSI project, a joint DPI&F and BPS initiative, has FMS Officer Avril Robinson, currently working on a new grower innovation website, a new grower record keeping management website, and towards preparation for upcoming CPI meetings which will commence in February for Invicta growers and early March for Inkerman, Pioneer and Kalamia growers.

Margaret Menzel
Burdekin Director

Central Region Report

Widespread rain across the entire region has occurred throughout January with no end in sight at this stage.

Most farmers would now like two weeks of sunshine, the crop is advanced and progressing well and this combined with a better price outlook is most encouraging.

The federal government's reef rescue package is being enthusiastically embraced and there is \$5.8 million committed to June 30 2009 for the central region with \$4.2 million committed to the sugar industry.

80 per cent of this total will go to funding A and B level projects with the remaining 20 per cent for administration and labour costs.

Over 250 applications have been received with one million dollars already committed to 50 individual projects and \$1.5 million to multi-industry sector projects.

There has been a lot of concern expressed in relation to comments made by Premier Anna Bligh about farmers and their effects on the Great Barrier Reef.

Minister for Sustainability, Climate Change and Innovation, Ian McNamara was in Mackay on Sunday February 15. Local farmers were able to put their views on Queensland government proposals to regulate the sugar industry.

Ross Walker
Central Region Director

Southern Region Report

Rain. Early January falls from 60 mm to 90 mm occurred across the Wide Bay region.

This was an almost forgotten experience. To those in the north and South this might seem not worth mentioning, but, in this region it has been of immense benefit. A

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fortnight without irrigation would be a bonus!

Soybean planting has been conducted across the region, but not without some difficulty.

The strike rate has been variable. Very high soil temperature and then a solid dumping of storm rain is not the best for soybean seed 20mm in the ground. It is very good for sugar cane ratoons though.

Planting soybean, while tricky, is not beyond the ability of farmers and sometimes a small investment by individual farmers can set you up with a planter that has reasonable performance.

A bit slower across the ground maybe, but, consider planting flexibility, cost of contractor, and perhaps other rotation crops as well.

There seems to be some jockeying for position as to who will save the reef. Kevin Rudd's team or Anna Bligh's?

Funding is available from both but, applications have a time input cost and must pass an assessment process.

I have made a request to Paul Neville, MHR for Hinkler to look at the assessment process and give ACFA some indication as to whether he sees the assessment process as sound and equitable to all applicants.

Recently, a school in the USA has had a class produce enough ethanol to run the school lawnmower for the year. I'm sure we can do better with our own sugar cane.

Anyone wishing to lend support for a similar project in our region is welcome to call me.

We will need help and it would be great to demonstrate the mower all around the region, no matter which School is involved.

Mike Hetherington
Southern Region Director

New South Wales Report

The New South Wales industry for the first time in many years did not harvest any cane after Christmas with all three mill areas finishing prior to this date.

This was a welcome result for farmers and harvesting crews along with all associated with the industry being able to enjoy the Christmas break.

Growing conditions have been excellent with the majority of the young crop looking well above average.

Both Condong and Broadwater cogenerations plants are now both online and running reliable generating electricity into the New South Wales power grid.

Most growers have not got their soya bean crop well established now with the good growth conditions from the high humidity.

The only concern is the high population of insect pests.

Wayne Rodgers
New South Wales Director

Got a story idea?

Do you have any interesting photos?

We'd love to hear from you

Call us at
1800 500 025

or email us at

Info@acfa.com.au

Your Local ACFA Directors

North Queensland Representatives:

Don Murday
Home Phone (07) 4098 1635
Mobile 0418 774 499
Email: mangopk@bigpond.net.au

John Blanckensee
Home Phone (07) 4061-2034
Mobile 0407 162 823
Email:jblancke@bigpond.net.au

Herbert Representative:

Carol Mackee
Home Phone (07) 4777 4957
Email:cjmackee@ozemail.com.au

Burdekin Representative:

Margaret Menzel
Home Phone (07) 4783 4776
Mobile: 0407 779 700
Email: mailsack@bigpond.com

Central Queensland Representative:

Ross Walker - Home Phone (07) 4954-3126
Mobile: 0429 615 711.
Email: walker@easynet.net.au

Southern Queensland Representative:

Michael Hetherington
Home Phone (07) 4126-9118
Email: hethostiny@optusnet.com.au

New South Wales Representative:

Wayne Rodgers
Home Phone (02) 6683-4852
Mobile 0414 834 430
Email: wvrodgers@optusnet.com.au

Australian Cane Farmers Brisbane Office

GPO Box 608
Brisbane Qld 4001
Tel 1800 500 025
Fax 07 3303 2024
Email: info@acfa.com.au

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