

REEF RESCUE

2012

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Mal Burston

Improved Farming System Using Controlled Traffic and Zonal Tillage Operations

Reef Rescue helped Mal Burston to make big improvements on his farm including adopting a controlled traffic system with zonal tillage operations. With the funding, Mal was able to modify some of his existing equipment to match his new row spacings and purchase new equipment to make the changes possible.

In 2009, Mal made the big decision to go to a controlled traffic system and increase his row spacings to 1.83 m with the help of Reef Rescue.

“The funding motivated us to do it and without it we would probably still be thinking about it,” Mal said. During 2009 and 2010 Mal has modified most of his equipment to suit his new row spacings including setting up his ripper and rotary hoe to be able to do zonal workings and more importantly coming into his second crop cycle.

“We have converted most of the farm and I am really seeing the benefits of it and will be happy when we are all done by 2013” Mal added. Mal also has wider headlands and drains to stop compaction around the farm that can cause erosion problems down the track.

As well as improving his soil management, Mal has taken advantage of Reef Rescue to make changes to his nutrient and chemical management practices. This includes in 2010 modifying a 2-row sub-surface side dresser to match his new row spacings which will be combined with a new liquid applicator to band apply other products like molasses as a nutrient source and annual application of lime to rectify any calcium deficiencies.

“We like to use irrigation to incorporate our fertiliser and will construct some more stormwater structures into the future on our dry land section to be able to do this over the whole farm,” Mal added. To improve his chemical management, Mal purchased a 4-row shielded spray unit in 2012.



About the farm...

Mal is a 3rd generation farmer and his family first moved to the 350 ha farm near Kuttabul in 1947. Back then it was a dairy and the conversion to cane started in the 1950's. It now has 280 ha under cane production with some grazing and is located around 30km North West of Mackay.

The farm is bordered by Palm Tree Creek which flows into Jolimont Creek and is part of the Murray Creek sub-catchment. Mal says that the creek has a major flood in it at least every 3 years which does come very close to the house.



“We used to use lots of residual chemicals across the farm but thought it was impacting on our cane. We now want to use more of a knock down strategy to reduce the impact on the crop,” explained Mal.

To do this Mal times some of his cultivation in plant cane for weed control and then in ratoons uses the shielded sprayer to apply knockdowns in the inter-row and into the stool. He is also going to add a 3rd tank and a boom to the

front of his spray tractor for vine control where required.

“The funding motivated us to do it and without it we would probably still be thinking about it.”

Mal was very supportive of Reef Rescue and said that “without the funding we may have done some things but certainly would not be as far down the track. We have changed our whole farming system in 4 years instead of 10 or more.” He does have some more projects he would like to do and added that “it would be great if Reef Rescue could continue so that we can finish the job we have started.”



Palm Tree Creek

OUTCOMES



Reduced risk of sediment losses with zonal tillage operation



Reduced risk of losses with well grassed drains and stormwater structures



Reduced risk of sediment losses from reduced cultivation

Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments is the regional NRM body who oversees the Reef Rescue program in the Mackay Whitsunday region for the federal government.

Contact the Reef Rescue team at Reef Catchments on (07) 4968 4200 or email: reception@reefcatchments.com.au