**the future of farming is here**

**MACKAY // Tuesday, 12th APRIL 2016**

Central and North Queensland’s most forward-thinking land managers are celebrating agricultural innovation, sharing knowledge on a cross-regional bus tour which began this week on the Atherton Tablelands.

 Visiting properties across the Wet Tropics, Burdekin Dry Tropics and arriving in Mackay-Whitsunday regions April 14th, the *‘Innovation in Agriculture’* bus tour will examine how farmers are trialling methods in mixed farming like horticulture, cane and aquaculture to boost productivity whilst improving water quality and protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

Local cane grower John Attard left school to farm in 1976 at Eton, he’s adopted many changes like homemade bio-fertiliser, brewing Nitrogen fixing bacteria and VAM. “As we learn more, farm management systems will reduce these costs further, I’m on tour to learn what’s working and what’s not.”

Reef Catchments Regional Landcare Facilitator Jacob Betros, knows agricultural entities need to build resilience to climatic events in order to achieve financial, social, and environmental outcomes in the face of adversity.

“Innovation wise I can’t wait to see Pacific Reef Fisheries in action. They use water from the Great Barrier Reef to grow black tiger prawns. The trial they’ll be showcasing is the bioremediation potential of high rate algae ponds.”

Tour highlights include Ray Zamora’s sugar cane farm at Euramo, south of Tully. Ray’s innovative practices were recently highlighted during Project Catalyst, from making bio-fertiliser, to cover cropping, he is also now trialling an aerator to reduce compaction.

Organic practices have also been shared at Inkerman. The Spotswoods, certified organic producers of low-input vegetables, fruit, and herbs, are pioneering integrating cattle into their horticulture and cane production.

With the variety of innovative practices being shared, Sustainable Agriculture Project Officer Daniel O’Keefe says “It is important that farmers have the opportunity to learn from other Farmers. They're often visual learners and very good at solving problems when something is right in front of them.”

The bus tour itself has provided the opportunity for three Natural Resource Management groups to collaborate and benefit all farming entities.

 “This is a huge step forward for individual landowners to work together in achieving whole of landscape outcomes. For ideas and skills to be shared widely and so seamlessly is a benefit to all primary producers.” Jacob said.

 The most exciting outcome for farmers networking this way is the ongoing learning. Reef Catchments will continue supporting innovation through the Australian Government’s National Landcare Programme and QNRM.

Two local examples are Simon Mattsson’s cane farm in Marian, west of Mackay along with Joe Muscats, the focus of day three (Thursday). Simon is well known for his trial of multi-species cover crops to enhance soil health and improve nutrient and pesticide use. Joe has been developing fibre production from sunn hemp and elephant grass alongside sugar.

ENDS

MEDIA are invited to attend Simon’s (1030) or Joe’s farm (1200) Thursday April 14th.

PLEASE CALL MEDIA CONTACT TO ADVISE OR FOR MORE INFORMATION

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