**dirty deeds – done dirt cheap**

**MACKAY // Friday, APRIL 22, 2016**

There are many ways to improve productivity and yield on farm, however there is a growing movement of producers looking at their soil condition as the place to begin.

Central Queensland Soil Health Systems (CQSHS) is a not for profit group of farmers seeking new and improved ways of growing crops and pasture whilst reducing costs over the long term.

It is widely recognised that soil biology needs soil carbon levels of 3% or more to become fully active. The calcium/magnesium ratio also needs to be correct so that soil PH will be at the desirable level. The group have also found compaction is a widespread issue for good water and air infiltration, vital for healthy soil.

Believing farmer-driven research and trials can address multiple issues at any one time through multiple science disciplines, the aim of CQSHS is to have all landholders involved, regardless of land use. Home gardners, graziers and growers of crops will find useful information presented by Dr Greg Bender, Dr Neil Wilson and David Hardwick at the Soil Health Symposium next week in Mackay.

Local farmer Allan McLean has been on the land all of his life, working his property with cattle and cane for 67 years and is keen to share his experience with everyone.

Adaptations include reduced tillage, stool splitting and the use of legumes to improve pasture (signal grass). Cattle have been an integral part of land management in rough terrain where fire can be an issue.

A founding member of CQSHS Allan feels collaboration is the way forward “Collectively we can come up with better strategies to improve practices, soil health is very important to remaining a viable farming enterprise. I’ve seen the benefits in soils becoming easier to till, hence less costs to work the soil and water retention from rain and irrigation greatly improved resulting in less runoff.”

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Reef Catchments is proud to support the event thanks to funding from the Australian Government’s National Landcare Programme.

Regional Landcare Facilitator Jacob Betros understands optimum soil condition is essential to all forms of agriculture, and ensuring healthy soils can deliver greater production to producers in an environmentally concious manner.

His job is to support groups and individuals to promote sustainable farm and land management practices.

“Not only do we work with sugarcane, but the programme also focuses on grazing, horticulture, and forestry. New scientific information regarding soil health is being generated faster than ever, and it’s important for local land managers, to adapt this information and implement new methods, to remain viable, and ensure sustainable production for future generations.”

According to Jacob, the most exciting change to date has been the improvement to soil compaction through remediation on Simon Mattsson’s farm.

“Intercropping with sunflowers has really given the soil a new lease on life. I was recently at his property and have seen how well the cane as done in the year following the sunflower harvest.” Jacob said. “Increased production means increasing economic viability. This ensures the Central QLD Coast region benefits environmentally and continues to offer stability to the community with employment, tourism, and agricultural industries.

ENDS

MEDIA are invited to attend Souths Leagues Club Tuesday April 26th (or Simon’s farm on either day).

For more information or to request an interview and arrange a time please call Kim.

**Interview contacts:**

Allan McLean, CQCHS **M** 0439 407 513

Jacob Betros, Regional Landcare Facilitator, Reef Catchments   
**M** 0408 904 036 **E** [**Jacob.betros@reefcatchments.com**](mailto:Jacob.betros@reefcatchments.com)

**Media Contact:** Kim Kleidon, Communications Consultant, Reef Catchments   
**P** 07 4968 4200 **M** 0417 882 091 **E** [media@reefcatchments.com](mailto:media@reefcatchments.com)