**sugar high is sweet success for the reef**

**MACKAY // Thursday, 28th APRIL 2016**

Following a review of projects delivered by Reef Catchments under the Australian Government’s Reef Programme, some exciting figures have emerged.

Approximately $1.1 million of Federal Government funding has been invested in farm plans which focus on improvements and practice change for nutrients, pesticides and irrigation efficiency, involving 305 individual growers since 2013.

Manager Katrina Dent is proud of the programme achievements, “To date Reef Catchments has outlaid an estimated $2 million in small ($300 per grower) and major (up to $90,000 for certain projects) grants with almost $500,000.00 still to be paid. The farm plans have been developed and reviewed over 2 and 3 years, being refined to allow growers to adopt best practice for water quality improvement, whilst aiming to increase productivity.”

Growers have matched this funding dollar for dollar, to illustrate their commitment to best management practice.

Mackay grower Joe Muscat has been keen to be involved since funding first became available in 2007. “Our first project through the early phase of the programme, offered the opportunity to improve our farming system and implement best practice. Without this investment our transition into A class practice would have been slowed, it’s allowed us to step into site specific crop management with variable rate ameliorants and irrigation being applied.” Joe has also been able to achieve the many fundamentals of a controlled traffic farming system, modifying nutrient, chemical and planting equipment to meet the system requirements. “Identified initiatives must continue to be supported strongly to achieve improvements that deliver real value for farming, the community and the environment. Currently we’re installing wetlands which will allow for improved water quality from our farm into the catchments.”

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For images or comment please contact Kim or Katrina.

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