

REEF RESCUE

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Gary Lay



IMPLEMENTING A CONTROLLED TRAFFIC FARMING SYSTEM

REEF RESCUE HELPED GARY LAY TO COMPLETE THE IMPLEMENTATION AND CONSERVATION TO A CONTROLLED TRAFFIC FARMING SYSTEM. WITH THE FUNDING, GARY WAS ABLE TO HELP FINISH MODIFYING HIS EXISTING EQUIPMENT AND PURCHASE SOME NEW ONES LIKE GPS GUIDANCE AND ZONAL TILLAGE EQUIPMENT.

In 2006, Gary first started to convert his farm from a 1.5m system to a 1.8m Controlled Traffic system. Gary says "after this year's planting, all of his farms will be fully converted over to the new system as well as all of his farming equipment". Reef Rescue has helped with many of these modifications including widening out spraying and fertilising equipment, the purchase of a zonal rotary hoe and the installation of GPS guidance.

Gary adds "one of the keys to the new system as outlined by the Sugar Yield Decline Venture is the utilisation of rotational legume fallows to help break the monoculture of cane and provide nitrogen for the following cane crop" and so he also received funding for a legume planter to help do this every year when the weather permits.

Along with improving soil management, Gary has been

adopting a range of practices to improve his nutrient and chemical management on farm as well. This has included using EM mapping and soil testing to identify different productivity zones across his farms and to match his nutrient inputs to these zones. Gary says "we will utilise the lower banded mill mud rates on our fallows where the beds will be, utilise the nitrogen that has been fixed from the legumes and then only top up any other nutrients required at planting".

For chemicals, Gary also received funding to modify his high clearance spray rig by fitting a second 400 L tank and better nozzles so that he can apply knockdowns in the inter-row and over the crop at out of hand stage. Gary says "with the move to a minimum tillage system, residual herbicides for weed control particularly in plant cane is important and I have switched to using some of the more UV stable



About the farm...

Gary is a 3rd generation farmer and manages 250ha across 3 farms within the Sandy Creek Sub-Catchment, around 20 km South-West of Mackay. One farm is on Drapers Creek which joins Sandy Creek just downstream from Eton. The second one is right on Sandy Creek at Homebush and the third near Oakenden on Rock Creek, which joins Sandy Creek downstream of the Homebush Road Bridge.

Gary was the winner of the 2010 Mackay Sugar Reef Rescue Productivity Award for implementing a range of eligible activities that can benefit both the farm and the environment.



This project is supported by Reef Catchments through funding from the Australian Government's



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ones that are currently available. As weed pressure is reduced, I may be able to use more knockdowns across the farms”.

Gary said that Reef Rescue really helped to achieve quicker the changes he has wanted to make and complete on his farms. “We would have done some of the activities hopefully over the next few years, but others would have been delayed if done at all” he added. One pleasing aspect about Reef Rescue Gary said was that he was easily able to do all of the paperwork and milestones associated with the project which at first he thought would be a barrier.

“WE WILL UTILISE THE LOWER BANDED MILL MUD RATES ON OUR FALLOWES WHERE THE BEDS WILL BE, UTILISE THE NITROGEN THAT HAS BEEN FIXED FROM THE LEGUMES AND THEN ONLY TOP UP ANY OTHER NUTRIENTS REQUIRED AT PLANTING”.

He finished off saying that he knows of quite a few growers who have taken up the incentives to make changes so it must be having some impact.

Outcomes

- Reduced risk of sediment losses with a Controlled Traffic minimum tillage system reducing erosion and run-off.
- Reduced risk from residual chemical losses with the replacement of residuals with knockdowns where practical.
- Improved soil health and reduced nutrient inputs from utilising legume fallows.



OUTCOMES



Reduced risk of sediment losses



Reduced risk from residual chemical losses



Improved soil structure and soil health

Reef Catchments

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

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