

REEF RESCUE

2012

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Improved Farming System using Controlled Traffic and Efficient Irrigation

Reef Rescue helped Ian Passfield to make a range of changes on his farm including adopting a controlled traffic system with improved nutrient management and efficient low pressure over head irrigation. With the funding, Ian was able to modify some of his existing equipment and purchase new equipment to make implementing the changes possible.

In 2009, Ian 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. He started by modifying his equipment including his spray rigs and fertiliser box to match his new system and in 2010 planted his first lot of cane on the wider rows.

To further improve the system, he used Reef Rescue funding to purchase a GPS and in 2012 will have converted his whole farm. The benefits of controlled traffic include reducing soil compaction and trials have shown that it improves water infiltration leading to less run-off and sediment losses from within the paddock.

As well as improving his soil management, Ian has made other

changes to his nutrient and irrigation management across the farm. In 2010 he modified his 3-row granular stool splitter fertiliser box with new double disc openers for accurate and effective sub-surface placement.

Ian said that “after using the double disc openers I would never go back to the legs as they do a much better job in a range of conditions, such as wet trash, with very accurate placement.” This means he can be confident it is putting out exactly the rates he planned using his EM mapping, soil testing and 6 Easy Steps recommendations.

In 2012 he also modified his planter to use liquid fertiliser which has allowed him to reduce his fertiliser rates due to it being more efficient and effective.



About the farm...

Ian is a 2nd generation cane farmer with his parents originally farming in the Victoria Plains area, just west of Mackay. Ian moved to his current 250 ha farm north of Bloomsbury in 1989 and now has 130 ha under cane production. The farm is located at the junction of the Andromache and O'Connell Rivers, which is around 75km North West of Mackay. Ian says the rivers have constantly changed since he moved there and are really silting and filling up. He was told that in the past people could ride a horse under the Caping Road Bridge leading to his farm and has noticed that floods now seem to do more damage to the banks.



Andromache River

“You get away from needing to have all inputs and reduce the risk of any a bag lifter which is just another job,” he explained. run-off from over irrigation.

Ian also improved his irrigation management through using controls on his pumps to regulate the amount of pressure going to equipment in his paddocks.

He already had a traveling boom and soft hose winches for application but has been able to increase their efficiency, incorporate

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“Without Reef Rescue I would not have made all the changes I have done. It has been a real help during some tough times of drought, floods and stand over cane,” Ian said. “The paperwork was not demanding, there was support along the way and if it continues who knows what we might do with new technology and products coming along,” he added.



OUTCOMES



Reduced risk of nutrient losses with accurate sub-surface applications



Reduced risk of chemical losses with accurate and effective applications



Reduced risk of losses from low pressure overhead irrigation

Reef Catchments

Reef Catchments is the regional NRM body overseeing 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 www.reefcatchments.com.au