



# CASE STUDY

Clarrie Mathiasen grows between 10,000 t – 12,000 t of sugar cane in the Mt Pelion and Calen regions. Approximately two thirds of Clarrie’s farm is in the Mt Pelion area, 45 km north-west of Mackay with the remainder located at Cameron’s Pocket, approximately 17 km by road from the Mt Pelion farm, of which around 7 km of the 17 km is on the Bruce Highway. This situation is reasonably typical for growers in the Mackay region, where the grower will have multiple farms but not necessarily located geographically adjacent. As for many growers with several spread out farms, it is not financially viable to own more than one set of farming equipment, for example fertiliser applicator and spray rig, so he must move his equipment from farm to farm. In Clarrie’s case along the busy Bruce Highway. Clarrie is a dryland farmer with some limited water supply to allow targeted irrigation, for example to assist replant cane immediately after planting.

Clarrie harvests his own cane on a 3/8 roster sharing employment of his haul out driver with his neighbour, who harvests in the other 5 days of the roster. Harvesting his own cane certainly assists his profitability and sustainability but the additional workload means limited time for the farm work, so careful planning is required to ensure operations are completed in a timely manner which Clarrie seems to achieve given his very good production per hectare averages. He also keeps up to date with new farming practices and equipment with regard to profitability and water quality.

## FOCUS ON



- ▶ Addressing his environmental responsibility through reduced residual herbicides and precision fertiliser application.

## OUTCOMES TO DATE

- ▶ Clarrie had arranged for modifications to his existing fertiliser applicator including the double disc openers and liquid fertiliser system. The Reef Trust 3 programme was able to financially assist Clarrie with these modifications to improve nutrition application and lower potential loss.

Clarrie has been farming for many years and agrees with the observation that the farmer of today has water quality considerations as a normal part of farm planning, along with profitability and sustainability. This change of thinking has occurred slowly over the last say 10 years, well before regulations and on farm compliance audits were introduced. Previously the focus was production at lower costs. For example the change to the new farming system of controlled traffic in the early 2000’s was justified in that it lowered operational costs without adversely impacting on production. Controlled traffic is automatically linked to lower production costs and increased water quality benefits.

Clarrie says “The farming community are aware of their environmental responsibility”.

It is important to stay up to date with farming practices and implementing the practices to suit your your individual farming operation. Clarrie aims to use as little residuals as possible. He ensures plant cane is kept clean during the fallow period, so that the trash blanket in the ratoons will do the majority of the weed control, thereby reducing the amount of residuals he requires in the ratoon crops.

Clarrie’s main interest is nutrition and at present fertiliser rates are being determined using 6 Easy Steps and soil tests. Clarrie has also adjusted his fertiliser rates according to other factors such as crop age, time of harvest and paddock history, these considerations are on-going with his Reef Trust 3 agronomist. Clarrie wished to further improve his fertiliser application by ensuring better subsurface placement of the fertiliser using a double disc opener assembly, and utilising the benefits of liquid fertiliser applied at a later stage after an initial application of the granular fertiliser.

## KEY POINTS



- ▶ Adoption of practices to suit the farming operation.
- ▶ Minimising use of residual herbicides on plant cane.
- ▶ Double disc openers for subsurface granular fertiliser application.



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