



# Grower Update

ISSUE 31 – OCTOBER 2018

**Welcome to the October issue of our BPS newsletter. We hope you find the articles contained in this issue informative.**



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## **SHED MEETINGS**

BPS and Farmacist will be holding shed meetings from Wednesday October 24 until Tuesday November 6.

See page 6 for dates, times and venues.

## BPS ACTIVITIES

### AGM REPORT

On the 21st August, 2018 BPS held its Annual General Meeting at the Ayr Showgrounds Hall. There was a much better roll up than last year and feedback received from those members who attended was that the presentations were well received and highly informative.

Chairman Bryce Davies declared the meeting open at 1.40 pm and welcomed members and guests before presenting the Chairman's report for the period from 1st April, 2017 to 31st March, 2018. He thanked former Chairman Chris Hesp who had recently stood down for health reasons, and welcomed his replacement, Alternate Director Chris Lyne, to the board.

Details in the Chairman's report included an outline of the board structure; an assurance to members of ongoing pest and disease support from BPS management and staff; an opportunity of bursary assistance for Burdekin students wishing to study Agricultural Science; the importance of maintaining a cash reserve; and a review of seed cane plot activity. In summary, Bryce urged all members to take advantage of the services provided by BPS.

Chairman Bryce Davies also offered a brief explanation of the strategy that would carry the company forward to 2020 and identified six goals contained within the Strategic Plan 2018-2020.

These are:

1. Minimise pests and diseases through seed cane supply and crop monitoring
2. Deliver a wide-ranging extension service to members
3. Participate in industry and Government funded projects that deliver value to growers and millers
4. Administration practices based on sound corporate governance and secure fiscal planning
5. Develop IT systems to enhance the collection, storage and communication of data
6. Adoption of new technologies to advance industry efficiencies.

At the conclusion of the Chairman's report, Manager Rob Milla delivered his annual report to members. Rob provided an overview of productivity group results, variety performance, seed cane sales, key pest and disease management issues, externally funded project work, trial data, and other extension activities.

The financial statements were presented by Company Secretary Mark Rickards. These showed that BPS remains in a sound financial position and that services provided to members have increased while the levy has remained unchanged at 7 c/t. Key income trends for the past 6 years were examined and the graph revealed that levy payments have remained relatively static during this time, while most of the income growth has come from project funding opportunities.

The final presentation of the AGM was from Matt Fealy (right). Matt's talk on the "Blue Sky Approach to the Business of Farming" outlined improvements he had made to turn around the productivity of a previously neglected mango and avocado property in Mareeba. A key part of his approach is the use of social media to portray a positive message. This has created a massive following leading to exciting marketing opportunities and an enormously improved return on investment. Matt explained that although marketing of sugar was very different to selling produce, the lesson is to harness the power of social media so that it works for you. He recommended that the sugar



industry be active on social media and use it to tell positive stories to inform and influence the general public.

A copy of the AGM report and presentations are available on the BPS website.

## 2017 SEASON PRODUCTIVITY AWARDS

The Burdekin Productivity Awards were also presented at the AGM. BPS would like to thank and acknowledge the award sponsors for their continued support. The award recipients for the 2017 season were:

**Peter and Ann Fiamingo** - Highest average farm CCS for a farm over 25 ha - 15.9 CCS. Award sponsored by QSL.

**RJ Lago** - Highest tonnes of cane per hectare for a block over 7.5 ha - 249 tc/ha. Award sponsored by Incitec Pivot Fertilisers.

**John Frasson** - Sugar producer of the year, highest farm average tonnes sugar/ha for a farm over 25 ha and with less than 28% plant cane – 21.8 ts/ha. Award sponsored by Wilmar Bioethanol Ag Services.



Productivity Award Recipients (left to right): Andrew Fiamingo with Greg Watson (QSL); Christian Lago and Mark Rickards (BPS); and John Frasson with Menno Bokma (Wilmar Bioethanol).

## NEW STAFF – CLAIRE BAILEY

Claire has recently joined BPS as an extension officer focussing on precision agriculture and GIS. She will be working with growers on GPS and new technology. Claire completed her studies at the University of QLD, Gatton where she majored in Plant Studies. She has been involved with the sugar industry since 2010, starting her career in Tully working for Tully Cane Productivity Services. Since then she has worked in other areas in the sugar industry as well as Tasmania and Victoria.

Claire is passionate about agriculture and enjoys all aspects of farming, she is looking forward to getting to know growers and the intricacies of the Burdekin area.





## PACHYMETRA ROOT ROT

Pachymetra root rot (*Pachymetra chaunorhiza*) is a sugarcane root disease that is caused by a fungus like organism. It is unique in that it only occurs in Australia where sugarcane is growing, or has been grown in the past, and is a major threat over much of the east coast. The Burdekin region tends to be one of the areas less susceptible, although there are still small areas that can be affected. The fungus typically attacks the root tips and breaks down the internal tissue, inhibiting them from growing or resulting in root death.

An affected cane stool will display soft, flaccid rot in larger roots and an overall small root mass. Reddening of roots may also be a sign in early Pachymetra infection. Stool tipping is very common as a result of reduced anchorage with a potential yield loss of up to 40% in varieties that are susceptible in severe enough cases. Pachymetra spores can survive in the soil for over 5 years and are able to be spread via soil carried on machinery or cane stalks, however are not transferable through water.

To test for Pachymetra presence, a soil test can be taken that analyses how many spores are present. The sample must be taken from the cane row and have enough samples to be representative of the whole area. A count of more than 30 000 spores/kg in a fallow or 50 000 spores/kg in a crop is an indication that there are above normal levels and management methods should be explored.

Mitigation and management of Pachymetra is based around the selection of resistant or less susceptible varieties of cane. Information about the disease sensitivity of cane varieties can be found on the SRA website under QCANESelect. General farm cleanliness such as cleaning down machinery and removing cane stalks can also reduce the risk of spread. Other methods such as sunlight exposure and short term fallows (less than 12 months) have little effect in controlling Pachymetra. Currently there are no fungicides that are economically viable to eliminate the spores.

BPS conducts an annual survey to monitor Pachymetra levels. This survey will be commencing shortly with 20 farms in each mill district being sampled. Previous surveys have confirmed that Pachymetra levels in the Burdekin remain low.

Pachymetra rating for Burdekin varieties



Figure 1: Pachymetra root rot on the larger cane roots showing flaccid roots.



Figure 2: The effect of Pachymetra on a resistant (left) and susceptible variety (right).

Pachymetra Rating	Variety
Resistant	Q247, Q238, Q183
Intermediate	Q253, Q252, Q240, Q232, KQ228, Q208, Q200
Intermediate - susceptible	SRA8
Susceptible	Q133

## FALLOW MANAGEMENT

With the end of the crush fast approaching, now is the ideal time to be planning your fallow management. The fallow period is an important part of the cane cycle. It provides a break in the life cycles of cane pests and diseases, allows blocks to be relevelled and is also an opportunity to manage hard to control weeds. When it comes to fallow options there are two main choices: a bare fallow; or a cropped fallow. Fallow crops can either be cover (sometimes referred to as green manure) crops or a cash crop. In the Burdekin legumes are the most popular fallow crops.



If major earthworks are necessary, then a bare fallow is really the only option. However, it is still a good idea to maintain some cover on blocks that are at risk of flooding if this is possible. A bare fallow may also be appropriate if there are specific weed problems that are difficult to control in a cropped situation. For example, nutgrass can be controlled with glyphosate in a bare fallow, and this will reduce the weed pressure going into the next cane crop.

If releveling is not necessary, or if it can be completed early, then a cropped fallow becomes an option. It is important to decide on the end use (grain or cover) of the crop before planting as management of a grain crop is very different to that of a cover crop. This is also the time to consider how the residue will be managed at the end of the fallow period. For cover crops it is generally recommended that they be mulched and the residue left on the soil surface, rather than incorporated. If they must be incorporated, this should occur at least 6 weeks before planting to give the green material time to break down in the soil.

Legume crops that are grown for grain require a much higher level of management than cover crops. It is important to make the decision on whether a crop is going to grain before planting, not halfway through the growing season. Some questions you should ask when considering planting a grain crop are:

- Am I prepared to invest the time and money required to grow a successful grain crop – e.g. water, insecticides, agronomic advice, harvesting and marketing costs?
- What are the marketing options or requirements and will this affect the choice of crop or the variety?
- Are agronomic services available?
- Will my choice of cover crop affect when I can plant cane?
- Are harvesting contractors available?
- How will I manage the residue? Will the header spread the chaff or will it be concentrated in windrows?
- Can I plant through the stubble or will I need to cultivate or reform beds?

Whatever fallow option is taken, some planning now will make managing both the fallow and the transition back to cane much easier.





## SHED MEETINGS

BPS and Farmacist are conducting shed meetings over the coming weeks. Topics to be presented include: latest variety trial results from this year, including newly released WSRA17; information on nutrition and optimising inputs of all nutrients during times of low sugar prices; grub control products and maximising their effectiveness; updates on YCS and other SRA research projects; and information on fallow management options. If any groups or growers have specific information or topics they would like covered, please contact your BPS Field Officer and we will try to provide this information. Growers are welcome to attend another group if they cannot make it to their regular shed meeting.

Date	Time	Group	Venue
Wed 24 Oct	8:30am	Leichhardt	Brotto Shed
Wed 24 Oct	1:00pm	Darvenizas/Down River/Ramsdens	B Santarossa
Thur 25 Oct	8:30am	Inkerman/Fredericksfield/Groper Creek	G MacElroy
Thur 25 Oct	1:00pm	Koolkuna/Marshalls/Iona	Klaka Rd Plot
Fri 26 Oct	8:30am	Osborne/Causeway	R Piva
Mon 29 Oct	1:00pm	Jardine/Mona Park/Barratta	L Smith
Tue 30 Oct	8:30am	Millaroo/Dalbeg	J Cambruzzi
Tue 30 Oct	1:00pm	Clare/Mulgrave/Stockham Rd	Clare Club
Wed 31 Oct	8:30am	Giru/Shirbourne	D Poletto
Thur 1 Nov	8:30am	Selkirk/Haughton/Bartlett/Upper Haughton	SISL
Thur 1 Nov	1:00pm	Aerodrome/Colevale/Town/Pioneer Mill	B Lago
Fri 2 Nov	8:30am	Jarvisfield/Kilrie/Rita Island	Quartermaine
Mon 5 Nov	8:30am	Airdmillan/Burstalls	N Formalin
Mon 5 Nov	1:00pm	Waterview/Sextons	E Pearce
Tue 6 Nov	8:30am	Airville/Dicks Bank/McDesme	BPS Shed

## NEXT GEN MEETING

The Burdekin Next Gen group had a barbeque at the BPS shed following the annual general meeting in August. The event was an opportunity for those who were unable to attend the showgrounds meeting to receive an update on BPS activities as well as meet with the guest speaker of the event Matt Fealy from Blue Sky Produce. Matt presented 'A Blue Sky approach to farming' which gave an overview of the practices he has implemented and the lessons he has learned since taking over an avocado and mango farm in Mareeba five years ago.

Following Matt's presentation SRA Burdekin variety officer, Catherine Kettle gave an update on emerging varieties and an overview of the plant breeding program.



It was a good night and we appreciate the effort made by the speakers of the evening.

The group also held a discussion to generate ideas about where they would like to visit on the 2019 annual Next Gen bus trip. As a result the group has decided to travel to the Northern Rivers Region of NSW next year during early February. If you would like to register your interest for the event please contact Cherrie on 0447 069 887.



## BPS STUDY BURSARY

Agriculture could be described as Australia's most important industry simply because populations worldwide cannot survive without food and nutrition. Demand for foodstuff is such that farmers must develop more efficient practices to produce more from the same amount of land. Agronomists, who have generally completed three years of tertiary study before obtaining a degree, play an ever increasing role in advising farmers on all types of productivity issues.

However, it is well recognised that there is a general skills shortage in agronomic expertise Australia-wide. To address this matter on a local level and to encourage Burdekin based secondary school students to progress into the field of agricultural sciences, the board of Burdekin Productivity Services Ltd has decided to offer financial support in the form of a bursary to one suitable candidate each and every year until further notice. This shall be known as the BPS Study Bursary. The BPS Study Bursary is not a donation to assist with the cost of university, but rather a reward for hard work, so there are conditions that must be met before the funds are distributed.

Applications for the bursary will open in November and a selection panel will interview applicants before offering the bursary to the student deemed most suitable.

The board, management and members of BPS regard the BPS Study Bursary as an important opportunity for local students to progress into the field of Agricultural Sciences and encourage as many students as possible to consider a career in agriculture. At present there are 2 bursary recipients studying at Gatton UQ campus, one in first year and another in his final year.

The following criteria must be met to qualify as a suitable applicant for a BPS Study Bursary:

1. Must be a current Burdekin resident who has resided in the district for the past 2 years at least.
2. Must have completed Year 12 in the last 2 years, either at a Burdekin High school or at a boarding college elsewhere.
3. Must have successfully completed, to the required standard, those Year 12 subjects that are required for acceptance into an Australian university course to study an agronomy related Bachelor's degree.
4. Must be willing to undertake full-time study on campus at a selected University and must be prepared to complete the selected course in the designated time period.
5. Must complete a written application and agree to be involved in an interview process with the Bursary Selection Committee if selected to do so.

The following conditions apply to a BPS Study Bursary:

1. A BPS Study Bursary shall activate only when the successful awardee is accepted into an agronomy related Bachelor's degree course at an Australian university.
2. Maximum payment for a BPS Study Bursary shall be \$15000 over a 3 year period. These funds shall be dispersed in tranches of \$2500 per semester (\$5000 per annum).
3. In any one semester, full payment of the \$2500 tranche shall remain dependent upon successful completion of all required course subjects during that semester.
4. In any one semester, a pro-rata deduction to the \$2500 tranche shall apply, but only if 75% or greater of required course subjects are completed successfully in that semester (i.e. at least 3 out of 4 subjects are completed successfully). If less than 75% of required course subjects are completed successfully in that semester, the \$2500 tranche shall be withheld and deemed not payable.
5. Tranches of a BPS Study Bursary shall be paid half yearly in arrears once written proof of semester results are presented to BPS management and confirmed by the relevant university.
6. If an awardee of a BPS Study Bursary changes or alters their university course at any time, whereby it no longer qualifies as an agronomy related Bachelor's degree course, the BPS Study Bursary shall be cancelled.
7. If an awardee of a BPS Study Bursary converts their university course to part time study whereby the length of time for completion is extended beyond that of fulltime study, the BPS Study Bursary shall be cancelled.

Application forms will be available on the BPS website, and through school careers advisors on 1<sup>st</sup> November. Applicants can also contact Mark Rickards or Rob Milla in early November to request an application form.

## STAFF CONTACTS

Contact	Title	Contact Number	Email
Office		(07) 4783 1101	<a href="mailto:reception@bps.net.au">reception@bps.net.au</a>
Fax		(07) 4783 5327	
210 Old Clare Road, Ayr QLD, 4807 PO Box 237, Ayr QLD, 4807			
Rob Milla	Manager	0490 036 329	<a href="mailto:rmilla@bps.net.au">rmilla@bps.net.au</a>
Mark Rickards	Commercial Manager	0427 834 800	<a href="mailto:mricksards@bps.net.au">mricksards@bps.net.au</a>
Marian Davis	Extension Agronomist	0428 927 079	<a href="mailto:mdavis@bps.net.au">mdavis@bps.net.au</a>
Cherrie Johnson	Trainee Extension Agronomist	0447 069 887	<a href="mailto:cjohnson@bps.net.au">cjohnson@bps.net.au</a>
Terry Granshaw	Extension Officer	0437 553 149	<a href="mailto:tgranshaw@bps.net.au">tgranshaw@bps.net.au</a>
Jasmine Connolly	Extension Officer	0438 934 601	<a href="mailto:jconnolly@bps.net.au">jconnolly@bps.net.au</a>
Claire Bailey	Extension Officer	0437 134 043	<a href="mailto:cbailey@bps.net.au">cbailey@bps.net.au</a>
David Paine	Field Officer – Kalamia	0427 167 159	<a href="mailto:dpaine@bps.net.au">dpaine@bps.net.au</a>
Leigh Chapple	Field Officer – Invicta	0427 372 124	<a href="mailto:lchapple@bps.net.au">lchapple@bps.net.au</a>
Ashley Taran	Field Officer – Inkerman, currently on maternity leave		
Wayne Johnstone	Field Officer – Inkerman	0407 960 057	<a href="mailto:wjohnstone@bps.net.au">wjohnstone@bps.net.au</a>
Maddy Molino	Field Officer - Pioneer	0407 167 159	<a href="mailto:mmolino@bps.net.au">mmolino@bps.net.au</a>