



Grower Update

ISSUE 54 – DECEMBER 2025

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



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CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR CLOSURE

The BPS office will close on December 19 at 4.30 pm and re-open at 7 am on January 5, 2026.

MANAGER'S CHRISTMAS MESSAGE

As 2025 comes to an end, it is great to see many crops thriving around the district. While tonnages were down this year, the early finish and good weather to date is looking good for a productive 2026 season. There has been plenty of action throughout the year to keep everyone busy, hopefully there is time over the festive season for members to have some downtime with family and friends.

I would like to start by thanking members for their support throughout the year, and also the BPS staff for their commitment and hard work providing services to members and the industry. A special thank you to the plot holders, managers and harvester operators as well. They all play a very important role in one of the cornerstones of a productive farm – provision of approved seed cane. Plot sales were very high again for a 3rd year in a row with almost 7000 t distributed across the region.

There have also been a large number of trials conducted throughout the year, variety trial data is included in this newsletter. Other trials have focused on phosphorus management, sub surface soil amendments and soil health. These will be discussed at shed meetings early next year. There also has been a sustained interest in growers achieving Smartcane BMP accreditation. This program is well regarded by community, government and buyers of Australian sugar. We currently have over 40% of the district accredited, and the more this increases, the greater is the potential to send a positive message to the community that we can manage our own industry without external regulations and maintain access to markets.

Looking forward to 2026, I hope members take advantage of the whole suite of BPS services. Ensure you lodge approved seed cane orders with your Field Officer by end of February 2026, also discuss obtaining an RSD plant source test as soon as possible. All staff will be focusing on RSD testing approved seed cane plots in early 2026, so grower tests will occur after plots are completed. Also contact BPS staff for soil tests early to assist us with workloads and avoid a backlog just prior to planting in 2026. Shed meetings will occur in partnership with SRA early 2026, be sure to attend to find out the latest information presented there. Ongoing work is occurring with SRA looking at options for alternatives to paraquat and imidacloprid.

Thank you again for your support throughout the year, let's look forward to a productive 2026! Wishing you and your families all the very best for the 2025 festive season

Rob Milla – December 2025



CHRISTMAS OFFICE CLOSURE AND STAFF AVAILABILITY

The office will be closed from 4.30pm on the 19th of December and will reopen on the 5th of January at 7.00am. During this closure there will be limited staff available. If there is an urgent situation, please contact the Manager Rob Milla on 0490 036 329 or the Commercial Manager Elliott Gullotta on 0427 834 800. For a non-urgent situation please email the relevant staff member (contact details on the back page) or call the office number (4783 1101) and leave a message. An employee will respond to the message when they return.

BPS wishes to thank all the growers for their contributions throughout the year, without your generous support BPS would not be able to offer all the services currently available, much appreciated! For any grower who is currently not a member of BPS now is the perfect time to renew your membership for the 2026 year. To get a new membership form please contact the office on 07 4783 1101 or email: reception@bps.net.au.

All the staff at BPS want to wish all the BPS members, growers, and community a very happy, merry, and safe Christmas and New Year.



SMUT UPDATE



Conditions for smut are very favourable right now and BPS staff have observed a lot of smut around the whole district. It is particularly prevalent in Q208. If you haven't seen smut, the plant produces a black whip in an inverted fish hook shape. This can be a few cm long right up to 1m long.

The whip can be quite black as in the picture, or once the spores (microscopic sized dust like particles) all fall off, it looks a grey colour.

Each whip can produce billions (yes, that's billions with a B!) of spores, and they are incredibly light and primarily spread by wind. They can also be spread by machinery or animals.

Smut typically thrives in hot dry conditions, and does affect cane that is stressed (particularly drought stressed) more. It also tends to affect ratoons more than plant cane.

Stools can also appear 'grassy' with thin leaves and stunted growth.

So, if you see smut on your farm what should you do?

- DO NOT PANIC! We have seen smut on most farms we have visited in the last few months. It is likely it's in every block of Q208, but we have seen it in KQ228, Q183, Q240, SRA32 and WSRA17. SRA23 appears to be the most resistant from our observations.
- Consider your plant source for next year. It is fairly easy to see if a block has smut right now (you will need to walk through it) – much more difficult when cane is much larger just before planting next year.
- We highly recommend using Sinker or other fungicides with the active ingredient flutriafol (this does not include Tilt or Bumper) as a fungicide at planting, as it will control smut spores in the soil for up to 9 months and can also control smut in an affected plant source.
- There are no products registered or economically viable to spray over the top of plants to control smut.
- Given that smut is around the whole district, we do not recommend ploughing out blocks with smut. Levels would have to be incredibly high to justify ploughing out in a commercial farm situation
- Ensure you don't stress your cane by providing adequate water, nutrition and weed control.

BPS through its regular plot monitoring program has observed some smut in approved seed cane plots. This has all been in ratoons, not plant cane. Approved seed cane plots have much more strict thresholds for smut than a commercial farm situation. BPS staff have removed all smut plants from plots that we have discovered, and we have ploughed out some small areas – this is to minimise risk of further spore loading in the immediate vicinity. However we need to appreciate that spores can be spread many, many kilometers by wind, so infections in all areas will continue. It has simply been the environmental conditions being so favourable that have caused a lot more smut this year. Approved seed cane at the BPS plots is still the best overall available source of plants.

If you have concerns, please contact any of the BPS staff about management or variety selection.

SPRAYING WITH A DRONE IN SUGARCANE

Supplied by Jack Robertson – Queensland Department of Primary Industries

The use of commercially available spray drones has made it possible to apply broadleaf herbicides to sugarcane in situations that were not practically or economically possible in the past. This has allowed growers more opportunities to control broadleaf weeds that otherwise would not be controlled until after harvest, but has increased the risk of off target application of these herbicides.



Growers should take a number of things into consideration when contracting a drone spray operator, or undertaking drone spraying themselves.

LEGALITIES

Operating a spray drone in Queensland requires the following licences from CASA and Biosecurity Queensland.

CASA:

- CASA RePL (remote pilot licence) certification for the specific drone model
- CASA ReOC (remote operator certificate)

Biosecurity Queensland:

- Pilot Chemical Rating licence
- ACDC (Aerial)

When engaging a contractor, ensure that they (or you if you are using your own drone) have the relevant licences. If using a contractor this is also a good time to check that there is appropriate insurance coverage.

CHEMICAL SELECTION

When selecting herbicides for application with drones growers should consider a number of things:

- Herbicide suitability: is the broadleaf herbicide (or herbicides) suitable for application with a drone?
- Are the lower water rates applied from drones going to impact efficacy?
- Your existing mix of broadleaf herbicides may provide suitable control but it helps to consult with your contractor/local agronomist/ productivity officer to confirm.

LABEL RESTRICTIONS

Herbicide labels have many restrictions for aerial application and application from a drone is no exception to this. It is important to ensure that the label of the selected herbicide notes:

- Aerial spraying – To apply a product with a drone it is important that the label includes aerial spraying. If a label only has 'aerial' listed, then application rates and restrictions when applied by drone fall under this section. If the aerial section differentiates between fixed wing and rotary/helicopter, then application by drone falls under the rotary/helicopter section.
- Buffer zones – The majority of products that can be applied aerially will have buffer zones to waterways, native vegetation and non crop areas. After the last review by the APVMA, products containing 2,4-D had large and complicated buffer zone restrictions added to their labels. Below is a label section that outlines the restrictions for applying products containing 2,4-D from a drone. It is important that before applying these products, the label is consulted to ensure that product is not applied within these buffer zones.

Aircraft

DO NOT apply by aircraft unless the following requirements are met:

- Spray droplets are no smaller than a VERY COARSE spray droplet size category
- For maximum release heights above the target canopy of 3 metres or 25 per cent of wingspan or 25 per cent of rotor diameter whichever is the greatest, minimum distances between the application site and downwind sensitive areas (see 'Mandatory buffer zones' section of the following table titled 'Buffer zones for aircraft') are observed.

Buffer Zones For Aircraft

Application rate	Aircraft Type	Mandatory buffer zones (distances given in meters)				
		Bystander Areas	Natural Aquatic Areas	Pollinator Areas	Vegetation Areas	Livestock Areas
Up to 250 mL/ha	Fixed Wing	Not Required	50	Not Required	50	Not Required
	Helicopter		40		40	
Up to 500 mL/ha	Fixed Wing		85		85	
	Helicopter		65		65	
Up to 1 L/ha	Fixed Wing		140		130	
	Helicopter		95		95	
Up to 1.5 L/ha	Fixed Wing		180		180	
	Helicopter		130		120	
Up to 3 L/ha	Fixed Wing		300		300	
	Helicopter		200		190	
Up to 4 L/ha	Fixed Wing		400		375	
	Helicopter		240		230	
Up to 4.75 L/ha	Fixed Wing		475		450	
	Helicopter		275		275	

CONTACTS/MORE INFORMATION

This has been a brief overview of a very complicated topic, if looking for more information call:

- Jack Robertson – 0447 108 017 or
- Marcus Bulstrode – 0475 817 738

WEATHER STATIONS

As some may have noticed, our weather stations have been offline recently. Many of the units have reached the end of their service life, resulting in failures or unreliable data. Recognising the value that accurate, local weather information provides to our members, the BPS Board has approved the purchase of 12 new Davis Instruments weather stations. We have been testing one unit over the past few months and have been satisfied with its performance. We have gone ahead with ordering another 11 to install across the Burdekin. Hopefully, early next year the stations will be installed, and they will be connected to our website for easy access for BPS members.



DUAL HERBICIDE SPRAYER: A DIFFERENT OPTION FOR BURDEKIN GROWERS

Burdekin growers now have access to a dual herbicide sprayer, making weed control more efficient, cost-effective, and accessible. Owned by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), the sprayer is free to all local growers, with BPS delivering it directly to the farm.

The sprayer allows for zonal targeted spraying, applying different herbicides to specific areas at the same time. For example, growers can use glyphosate along water furrows to tackle weeds in these zones while applying Gramoxone on the cane stools to control weeds around the base of the cane. This targeted approach reduces chemical waste, boosts accuracy, and saves time by cutting down on the number of passes needed across the paddock.



With no hire fees and easy access through BPS, this initiative offers growers of all sizes a practical tool to improve weed control. It helps lower input costs, promotes best practices, and supports sustainable farming in the Burdekin region.

For growers looking to save time, money, and resources, the dual herbicide sprayer is a valuable asset that delivers real benefits right where they're needed.

VARIETY TRIAL RESULTS

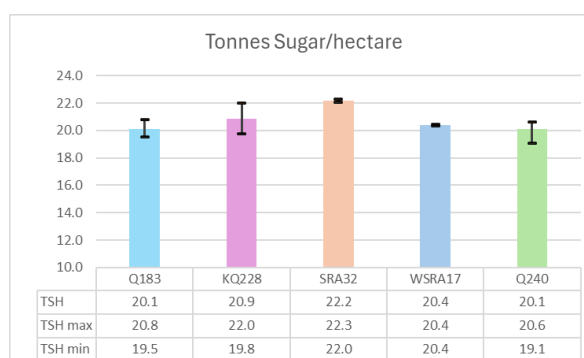
This past season we have harvested four variety trials. Two of these were new trials with plant cane, and the other two were existing trials at first and second ratoon. We would like to thank all of the cooperating growers and their harvesting crews for their help with running and harvesting the trials.



The \$/ha return for all trials has been calculated using the sugar price formula less the cost of harvesting and levies. A sugar price of \$600/t and harvesting and levies of \$10.50/t was used.

Mona Park - Plant Cane - Planted 14/4/24, harvested 13/6/25

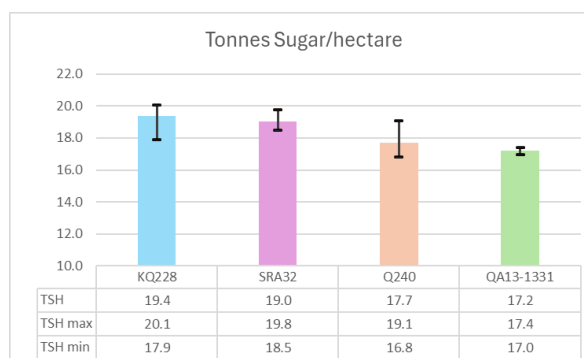
Variety	TCH	CCS	TSH	Return \$/ha
Q183	143	14.1	20.1	6379
KQ228	132	15.8	20.9	7121
SRA32	178	12.4	22.2	6361
WSRA17	146	14.0	20.4	6439
Q240	138	14.5	20.1	6490



SRA32 was the best performing variety for tonnes of cane per hectare, but well behind the rest of the trial for CCS. KQ228 had the lowest cane yield, but the highest CCS. Overall SRA32 was the highest TSH, but KQ228 had the best \$/ha return.

Marshalls - Plant Cane - Planted 1/5/24, harvested 3/7/25

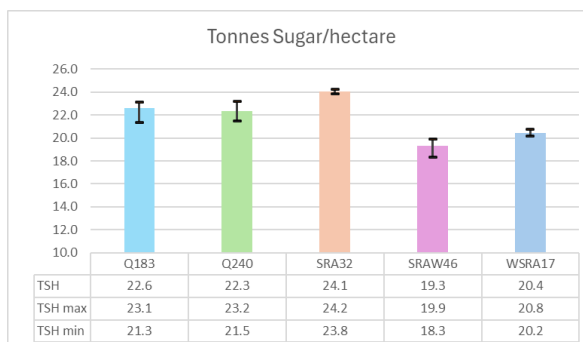
Variety	TCH	CCS	TSH	Return \$/ha
KQ228	138	14.1	19.4	6126
SRA32	159	12.0	19.0	5277
Q240	141	12.5	17.7	5113
QA13-1331	131	13.1	17.2	5172



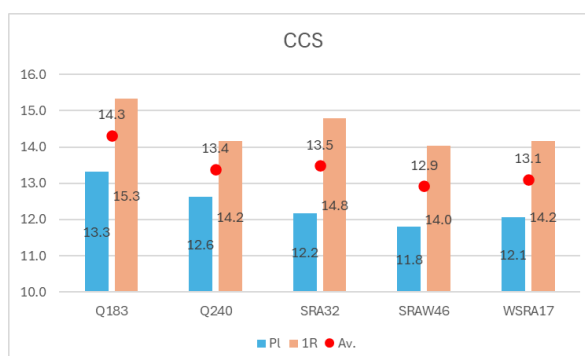
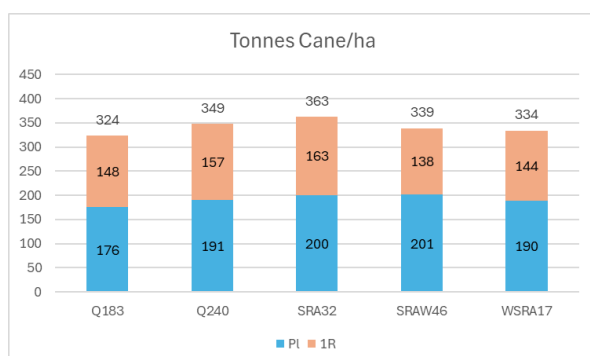
As with the Mona Park trial, SRA32 had the highest cane yield, but the lowest CCS. KQ228 had the best CCS and the highest sugar yield and \$/ha return. Q240 and the experimental variety (QA13-1331) had quite different cane and CCS results, but ended up with similar tonnes of sugar and \$/ha returns.

Colevale - 1st Ratoon - Plant harvested 15/7/24, 1R harvested 18/8/25

Variety	TCH	CCS	TSH	Return \$/ha
Q183	148	15.3	22.6	7644
Q240	157	14.2	22.3	7174
SRA32	163	14.8	24.1	7961
SRAW46	138	14.0	19.3	6174
WSRA17	144	14.2	20.4	6570



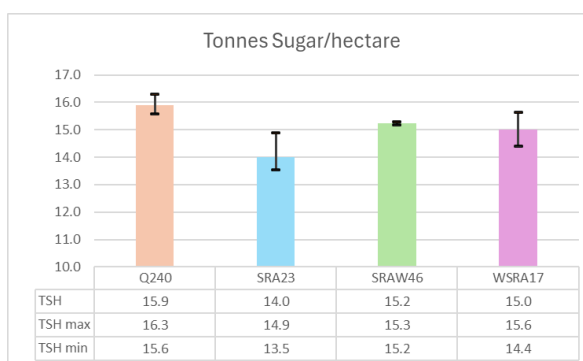
Once again SRA32 had the highest cane yield, but in this trial the CCS was also the second highest after Q183. This was somewhat unexpected as SRA32 is considered a high tonnage, low CCS variety. SRAW46 fell from the highest yielding variety in plant cane to the lowest in first ratoon.



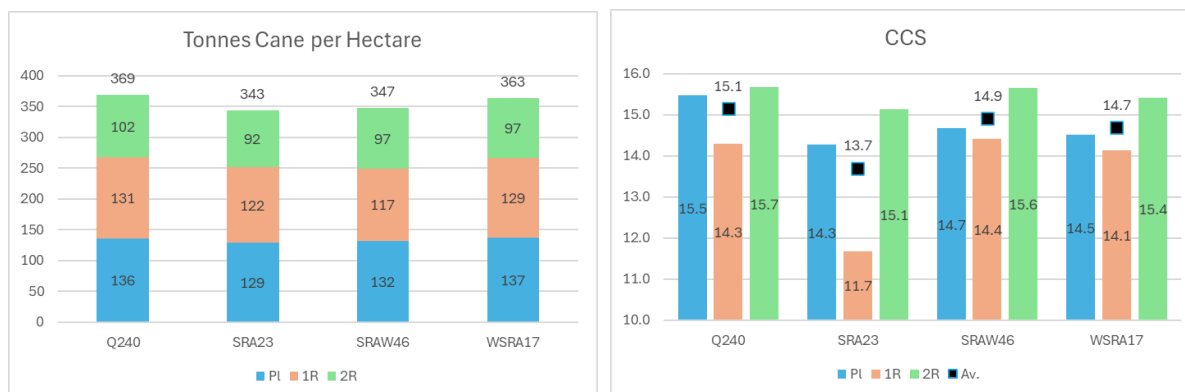
The cumulative results show SRA32 with the highest total cane yield followed by Q240. Q183 has had the lowest total cane yield, but the highest CCS in both years.

Mona Park - 2nd Ratoon - 1R Harvested 17/11/24, 2R harvested 17/10/25

Variety	TCH	CCS	TSH	Return \$/ha
Q240	102	15.7	15.9	5398
SRA23	92	15.1	14.0	4653
SRAW46	97	15.6	15.2	5168
WSRA17	97	15.4	15.0	5045



In this trial Q240 had the best cane yield, CCS, sugar yield and return. SRA23 had the lowest cane yield and CCS. WSR417 and SRAW46 had very similar performance. This is consistent with results from plant and first ratoon.



Q240 has consistently been the best performing variety over the 3 years of the trial, closely followed by WSR417. Overall SRA23 has had the weakest performance with a particularly low CCS recorded in first ratoon.

SEED CANE ORDERS

It's that time of the year, where we are asking you to start thinking about your approved seed cane orders for the next planting season. While field officers are collecting crop data, they will be asking you for your seed cane order or to at least start thinking about what you would like to order.

The varieties that we have on offer are the same as last year:

- Q240
- KQ228
- Q208
- Q183
- Q232
- SRA23
- WSR417
- SRA32.



To place an order please contact your field officer asap, so we can reserve cane for you. For those getting cane from the Giru plot, keep in mind that we do not save cane for orders, it's first in best dressed. Still let us know if you are wanting cane from Giru so we can let you know what's left and when we are running low on a specific variety.

ITCH GRASS AND WILD SORGHUM MANAGEMENT

Itch grass and wild sorghum are difficult to control weeds in cane. Compared to other grasses they are tall growing which makes them more competitive in terms of competing for light and resources. In addition there are very few herbicides registered specifically for either weed.

The good news is that SRA has been conducting screening trials of a number of herbicides and herbicide combinations against both weeds. All of these actives are registered in sugarcane at the tested rates so they can legally be applied if other weeds (for which they are registered) are present. For example Bobcat i-maxx is registered in cane to control awnless barnyard grass, and will also control itch grass.

Not all products containing the same active ingredient are registered in sugarcane. Before applying any chemical product make sure that it is registered for use in cane and follow all label directions.

ITCH GRASS

Itch grass is a highly competitive weed. It grows very tall and produces lots of seeds which can remain dormant in the soil for many years. In addition, when it is stressed it can flower and set seeds on very small plants which may not be easily seen within the crop.

The fallow period is a good time to control itch grass with glyphosate. As with all weeds, aim to spray when the weeds are small, use the correct nozzles and water rate, and don't spray stressed weeds as they will not take up the chemical efficiently. Light cultivations may stimulate itch grass seeds to germinate, they can then be sprayed with glyphosate. Deep cultivation is not recommended. While it may bury some seeds, there is still the risk of them germinating.

During the crop cycle a combination of pre and post emergent controls are best with the aim being to minimise the amount of itch grass that emerges and then "mop-up" any escapes. Manual rogueing should be considered the last resort.

SRA trials have identified a number of effective chemicals and combinations. Before applying any of these products ensure that you have a target weed that is on the label.



Figure 1 Itch Grass (Wikipedia)



Figure 2 Wild Sorghum (B. Hacker)

For products that contain diuron remember that there are no-spray windows when diuron can not be applied. In the Burdekin the no spray windows are:

Diuron Rate	Closed (No-spray) Window
4 kg/ha	1 December to 29 February
3-4 kg/ha	1 January to 29 February
530 – 900 g/ha	Apply at any time

The most effective products identified for pre-emergent control of itch grass were:

- Combined diuron + hexazinone e.g. Bobcat Combi WG @ 4 kg/ha (registered for itch grass in cane),
- Combined imazapic + hexazinone e.g. Bobcat i-maxx @ 630 g/ha,
- Isoxaflutole + hexazinone e.g. Balance 750 WG @ 100 g/ha + AC Tressel @ 2 L/ha,
- Imazapic + amicarbizone e.g. Spark @ 200 mL/ha + Amitron @ 1 kg/ha,
- Isoxaflutole + diuron 900 e.g. Balance 750 WG @ 200 g/ha + Diuron 900 @ 0.5 kg/ha,
- Flumioxazin e.g. Valor @ 0.7 kg/ha

The most effective post-emergent (knockdown) products were:

- Paraquat 330 + amicarbizone e.g. Spraytop 330 @ 0.9 L/ha + Amitron @ 0.5 kg/ha,
- Paraquat 330 e.g. Spraytop 330 @ 1.2 L/ha

To read more about the SRA trials check out the Spring edition of Cane Matters (<https://tinyurl.com/itchgrass-trials>) or the new itch grass fact sheet (<https://tinyurl.com/itchgrass-factsheet>).

WILD SORGHUM

As with itch grass, the fallow period is the best time to start wild sorghum control measures. During this time it can be sprayed with knockdowns to reduce the pressure going into the cane cycle.

SRA have tested a number of products and mixes on sorghum sourced from the Burdekin and found several that provide good control. None of these products are registered specifically for sorghum control, but are registered for other weeds in cane.

The most effective products were:

- Isoxaflutole + hexazinone e.g. Balance 750 WG @ 100 g/ha + AC Tressel @ 2 L/ha
- Combined Diuron + hexazinone e.g. Bobcat combi @ 4 kg/ha
- Combined Imazapic + hexazinone e.g. Bobcat i-maxx @ 630 g/ha
- Metribuzin e.g. Mentor WG @ 2 kg/ha

The least effective option was Pendimethalin 445, e.g. Stomp Xtra @ 3.3 L/ha, which was no more effective than the untreated control.

RECENT TRIAL WORK

SOYBEAN INOCULANT CARRIERS & ORGANIC NITROGEN FERTILISERS

KEEN FOR BEANS – EFFECTIVENESS OF NOVEL SOYBEAN INOCULANT CARRIERS

Soybeans may not be sugarcane, but they can play a valuable role in sugarcane cropping systems in the Burdekin. Incorporating soybeans as a fallow crop can potentially increase cane productivity when planted after soybeans, improve soil health and water infiltration and provide an additional source of income.

To support these benefits further, BPS in collaboration with Griffith University and the Soils CRC, is running a field trial to investigate the effectiveness of seven different soybean inoculant carriers. The hope is that one of these new carriers might allow a longer lifespan of the rhizobia when planting into hot soils during summer. The carriers being evaluated are biochar, manure, manure granules, diatomite, and mill mud, and they are being compared to a commercial freeze-dried inoculant (EasyRiz) and the standard peat based inoculant. The trial is being held at Ayr DPI research station, involving collaborative effort from both BPS and Ayr DPI staff to manage the field.

The hands-on work has involved collecting whole plant samples from each plot- roots and all. The plants were carefully taken back to the office (much to the delight of the rest of the BPS team to enjoy their distinctive beany smell) for detailed plant and root nodule assessment. Measurements taken included root length, stalk length, stalk diameter, and number of leaves. Nodulation scoring was based on number, position, colour and overall nodulation effectiveness. Once all the data was collected, the average nodulation scores were compared to determine if any inoculant treatments were significantly better or worse than others.



TRASH TO TREASURE? – WASTE PRODUCT BASED ORGANIC NITROGEN FERTILISERS FOR USE IN SUGARCANE

Most nitrogen used in agriculture comes from synthetic fertilisers - reliable products that when applied in the right place, at the right time, and rate, provide readily available nitrogen for crops to uptake.

Organic forms of nitrogen can offer a different set of advantages. They can help improve soil health by adding beneficial soil microbes and organic matter. They may also release nitrogen more slowly, reducing the risk of loss from the system and potentially improving uptake. The challenge, however, lies in identifying organic products that consistently deliver strong results.

To help address this, Griffith University has developed three different organic nitrogen fertiliser products to be tested for use in sugarcane cropping, BPS being tasked with running the field trial. These products include biochar, green waste, and cow manure. Urea and a zero-fertiliser treatment were also included to allow us to compare uptake differences between treatments.

BPS staff applied the products at hill-up stage to ensure they were incorporated into the bed. Since application, the team has sampled plants to assess for plant nitrogen content and taken deep soil cores to investigate if nitrogen has leached down the soil profile. The same sampling process will occur every 3 months until harvest when yield and CCS of each treatment will be measured.



STAFF UPDATES



CAMERYN KOIA

In March 2025, Cameryn joined the BPS team and started a traineeship whilst still attending school at Burdekin Christian College (BCC). Cameryn has always had an interest in agriculture due to being involved in the industry her whole life. She wishes to learn more about the industry while working at BPS.



NINA LAUBSCHER

Nina Laubscher will be moving from the Invicta Field Officer position to looking after the Kalamia area from January next year. Nina can be contacted on 0427 372 124

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