Grower Update

ISSUE 55 – MARCH 2026

Burdekin Productivity Services

PRODUCTIVITY PROFITABILITY SUSTAINABILITY

Funded by Burdekin Canegrowers and Wilmar Sugar

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

This issue contains:

PLOTS UPDATE

RSD testing has been completed for all the distribution plots. Pending clear results plots will open with opening dates to be decided by the plot owners. The Inkerman plot has already opened. The remaining plots are expected to open shortly after Easter.

As opening dates are confirmed they will be communicated to growers.

If you haven't put in an order for seed cane or would like to change your order, please contact your field officer as soon as possible.

Available varieties by plot

Variety	Inkerman	P&K	Brock Rd	Giru	Millaroo
KQ228					
Q183					
Q208					
Q232					
Q240					
SRA23					
SRA32					
WSRA17					
	Available	Not Available			

KALAMIA AREA CONTACT

Anna Greenland will be the new contact for Kalamia area growers. She can be reached on 0428 242 537 or agreenland@bps.net.au

Anna joined BPS in early 2025 with the QFF graduate program. Anna grew up in Cairns and moved down to NSW to complete her bachelor's degree in agriculture at the University of New England. She has a keen interest in agriculture and is eager to assist growers in all aspects of production.

RESIGNATION OF NINA LAUBSCHER

Nina commenced work with BPS on the 20/03/2023 as the Invicta Field Officer after moving her family from South Africa to the Burdekin. She was in the Invicta Field Officer position for a couple of years until health issues caused her to return in part time capacity during the 2026 as the Kalamia Field Officer. Due to family requirements and health issues, she resigned from her employment with BPS at the start of the 2026 year. Throughout

her employment Nina was a valuable asset to BPS and enjoyed helping growers out with any query they had. On a personal note Nina also gained permanent Australian citizenship while employed at BPS. From all the BPS team we wish Nina and her family all the best for many years to come.

SHED MEETING WRAP UP

BPS and SRA delivered shed meetings in February – it was a great chance to catch up with lots of members and discuss a range of topics. A snapshot of some of the topics is covered below. If you would like any more information, contact Rob (0490 036 329) or Terry (0457 650 181).

Productivity data from 2025 Season

A lot of information was presented in relation to the 2025 season – including productivity group performance data, variety performance data and variety x soil type x crop class at both a district and productivity group level. If you did not receive a productivity report for your district or productivity group, please contact anyone at BPS for a copy. Some key points that were discussed from the 2025 season:

- 107 tonnes cane/ha district average
- 14.45 CCS district average
- 15.5 tonnes sugar/ha district average
- Most varieties performed fairly similarly for tonnes sugar/ha
- All mill areas had very similar ranges of performance. Regardless of mill area, there were farms that had high average farm yields (>150 t/ha) and CCS (16.0) as well as farms that had challenging constraints to deal with.

Variety trial data

Data from last year's variety trials was presented – all this data is available in the BPS December 2025 newsletter. There was a significant amount of discussion around SRA32. Trial data is showing very strong yield improvements over the standards, and mixed results with CCS. It was released as a low CCS variety, however some trials have it performing equivalent to Q240 for CCS. Most of the feedback from growers who have trialed small amounts of SRA32 was that they have been impressed with its performance. However it is recommended to harvest mid season and avoid early harvest to ensure CCS is not compromised. For more information on management of SRA32, discuss with any BPS staff member.

Soil health and carbon

Soil organic carbon plays an important role in soil health, chemistry, physiology and crop resilience. There are three main forms that exist in the soil. Labile carbon is made up of manure, plant/ animal residues and microbes, and is easily lost from the topsoil as it is the most fragile form. Soil biology rely on this as a food source and is very important if you want to build biodiversity and maintain it. As decomposition of labile carbon continues, it forms into a humus layer which is a more stable form of carbon as it is stored in the dead microbes that were breaking it down. The most resistant form is called **inert carbon**, examples of this include charcoal or biochar, which persist in soil for a very long time.

Increasing carbon in your soil in any of these forms can help improve your soil's biodiversity which in turn helps bind soil particles, enhance water infiltration, improve nutrient use efficiency, and improve aeration; all of which are integral for crop productivity and sustainability.

Building soil carbon focuses on increasing the more stable forms (humus and inert carbon). This can be achieved by adding organic inputs like compost, mill by-products, manure, and green waste, as well as growing diverse crops in a sugarcane fallow. Maintaining soil carbon is just as important as building it, this can be done by minimising soil disturbance (tillage). In regions like the Burdekin, warm and moist conditions accelerate decomposition, making it more challenging to build and store soil carbon. However, the same principles above still apply, consistently adding organic inputs to the soil and reducing soil disturbance is the main way to build carbon. A promising future alternative to build soil carbon could be something called biochar.

Biochar is a charcoal-like substance made from organic material that has undergone a process called pyrolysis. This involves placing the material in a high temperature, low oxygen environment which cooks the biomass until all that's left is a stable, carbon rich material. Biochar has a huge surface area due to the microscopic pores it contains which can provide a home for millions of microbes when placed in soil. At the moment it is not available on a commercial scale, however, more research is being done to get it there. An exciting possibility is using biochar as a way of creating slow release products by infusing these pores with nutrients and soil amendments.

If you are interested in assessing your soil health there are many tests available, all with varying costs and information which can be up for interpretation. A test the Soil CRC researchers have been working on is called the ACE protein test which assesses the

proteins released by soil microbes and fungi. This test is cheap (under $50) and provides a reasonable overall assessment of soil health and function.

Improving soil carbon is a long-term investment that requires careful management. Identifying and addressing limiting factors such as soil constraints or nutrient imbalances is essential. While soil organic carbon can be built over time, it can also be lost quickly, making consistent, sustainable practices key to long-term soil health and productivity.

Harvester fan speed losses in burnt cane

Data was presented from burnt cane harvester fan speed trials conducted in the Burdekin over two years (2018 and 2025) by SRA. The trials were conducted in a way that there was no hold up of harvesting contractors, and they harvested the crop as they normally would, with only fan speed being altered. Three fan speeds were used low (0 RPM), moderate (500-650 RPM) and aggressive (800-850 RPM). Yield losses from the aggressive speed compared to the zero treatment averaged 3.7 t/ha, but were up to 9 t/ha. Yield losses for the moderate fan speed compared to zero were 1.8 t/ha. While these numbers may seem small, when spread over the whole Burdekin crop there is potentially 120 000 - 260 000 t of losses from the Burdekin crop. Or in terms of cost to growers, contractors and the mill, $5.5 to $11M lost.

Newer model cane harvesters are more fuel efficient due to better hydraulics and engine torque matching demand. In 2025 the measured reduction in fuel usage when changing extractor speed from aggressive to zero was 4 L/hour. For a full picture of this data, contact Terry at SRA.

Crop Maturity and Moddus

SRA has researched the optimum plant moisture content for harvest in order to maximise CCS and tonnes of cane. Crop maturity is at around 70% plant moisture. If the plant moisture content is over 70%, it means the crop is still growing. A crop moisture of around 65% typically gives the best balance of CCS and yield. Based on current data, around 1 million tonnes of the crop in the Burdekin is harvested before maturity; that is, when the crop is under 12 months old. Plant growth regulators such as Moddus can help manage crop maturity. These should be applied to actively growing crops 8-12 weeks before harvest. Using an average cane price of $40/t and CCS of 14, the cost of application (including helicopter or drone) is around 0.2-0.3 CCS. Typical responses to Moddus range from 0.5-1 CCS unit – so a very good return on investment. Most crops ratoon better after Moddus as well.

Smut

Smut is a fungal disease that affects sugarcane and can reduce yield when high enough infection occurs. Typical characteristics include grassy shoots, stunted growth, and a black whip that when brushed creates a black smudge. At the end of 2025 and into the 2026 season we saw perfect conditions for smut proliferation (hot and dry). Varieties that will most likely display symptoms of smut in the Burdekin include Q208, WSRA17, SRA32 and KQ228. Last year BPS found smut in the approved seed cane plots, this is not the fault of the farm managers, but rather the weather conditions and amount of smut in the district, as well as the fact that plot cane is held back to make sure it does not lodge to ensure straight cane for billet planting. Some varieties were ploughed out at one of the plots because the infection threshold was too high **for approved seed cane.** The threshold for approved seed cane is much lower than for commercial crops.

If you find smut on your farm there is no need to plough out the block. Instead, monitor it and minimise stress on the crop (adequate irrigation) to lower risk of the disease spreading to neighbouring blocks that may be more susceptible. If you are concerned, please call your field officer.

Canegrub Trials

Three trials comparing 10 different grub control products have been applied across the Burdekin region by SRA. These are small plot trials sited in areas with high grub pressure and a history of limited imidacloprid use. Two of the treatments are Imidacloprid and Clothianidin (Shield) – the others are all products that have not previously been used in sugarcane for canegrub control. Grub digs will soon be undertaken at each of the sites to assess the number of grubs and product efficacy. Initial inspections are showing very high grub pressure in the plots with no control applied at one of the sites, and moderate grub pressure at the other two sites. This grub pressure means the sites will allow effective comparison of potential products.

Wild Sorghum and Itch Grass

Both Wild Sorghum and Itch Grass were raised at shed meetings as weeds of great concern in the region. See article in this newsletter detailing control options.

Increasing percentages across all topics

At the end of each shed meeting, a discussion was held around all the topics discussed and how they were focused on addressing the most limiting factor on a farm. Each farm will have different limiting factors and constraints. However if each farm made some small adjustments to the issues within their control, that are limiting their productivity by a small percentage, then this will have significant improvements to overall productivity of the district. Please reach out to BPS and SRA staff for assistance with identifying the limiting factors or constraints on your farm and potential solutions to manage these factors.

WOODFORD DISEASE TRAINING COURSE

On the 24th and 25th of February, six staff members from Burdekin Productivity Services (BPS) attended the disease training course held at the Sugar Research Australia (SRA) research station at Woodford. The staff who attended were Jack, Wayne, Elliott, Rina, Anna and Asha. BPS staff attend this course every two years to ensure our disease identification skills remain up to date and that we stay aware of potential threats to the sugarcane industry. Although many of the diseases covered are rarely seen in the Burdekin region, the training is an important refresher and helps ensure that our field officers are prepared to recognise unusual symptoms should they ever appear in local crops.

The SRA research station at Woodford plays a very important role in disease research and plant pathology for the Australian sugarcane industry. The facility is used to screen new sugarcane varieties for resistance to major diseases before they are released commercially to growers. Because the site is located away from major cane-growing regions, it provides a safe environment where researchers can study diseases that would pose a significant biosecurity risk if introduced into commercial production areas. This isolation allows scientists to work with a wide range of pathogens and better understand how they affect sugarcane plants.

Much of the training was conducted indoors however we walked through several research plots containing different diseases and disorders. This hands-on approach allowed us to closely inspect infected plants, compare them with healthy plants and discuss symptoms with the SRA pathologists. Being able to inspect root systems and look at leaf symptoms in person was particularly useful, as it reinforced how these diseases present in the field. It also gave everyone the opportunity to ask questions and share experiences from their own regions.

During the course we were shown examples of several important sugarcane diseases. These included **Fiji Leaf Gall**, a virus spread by planthoppers that causes distinctive swellings or galls on the leaves and midrib. We also discussed **Ratoon Stunting Disease (RSD)**, a bacterial disease that infects the plant's vascular system and can be difficult to

detect in the field, highlighting the importance of testing methods such as LSB and xylem sampling. Other diseases covered included **Chlorotic Streak**, which causes pale yellow streaks on leaves and is often associated with waterlogged soils, and **Leaf Scald**, a bacterial disease that produces thin white "pencil line" streaks and can spread systemically through the plant. We also observed **Sugarcane Smut**, which is recognised by the distinctive black whip emerging from infected plants. In addition, the course covered soil-borne diseases such as **plant-parasitic nematodes** and **Pachymetra Root Rot**, both of which affect the root system and can reduce plant growth and productivity.

The training course also provided a good opportunity for staff from different productivity services and organisations to share experiences and discuss issues they are seeing in their regions. Conversations throughout the course allowed participants to compare monitoring programs, disease detection methods and management approaches. This exchange of knowledge is valuable for strengthening collaboration across the industry and ensuring that information about emerging threats or management practices can be shared quickly between regions.

Overall, the disease training course was a valuable opportunity for BPS staff to refresh our knowledge and see a range of diseases that are not commonly encountered in the Burdekin region. Training like this helps ensure that our team remains prepared to recognise disease symptoms in the field and provide accurate advice to growers. By staying up to date with the latest research and identification techniques, BPS can continue to support the local sugar industry and help protect it from potential biosecurity threats.

WILD SORGHUM MANAGEMENT

This article has been reproduced and is copy from our last newsletter due to high demand for information with the amount of sorghum in the industry.

Wild sorghum is difficult to control grass weed in sugar cane crops. Compared to other grasses it is 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 sorghum.

The good news is that SRA has been conducting screening trials of a number of herbicides and herbicide combinations against sorghum. 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 at 630 g/ha, and will also control wild sorghum.

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.

Sorghum is best controlled in the fallow period. During this time it can be sprayed with knockdowns to reduce the pressure going into the cane cycle.

An Integrated Weed Management Plan (IWMP**)** is one of the best tools growers can use to reduce weed pressure. Combining chemical and mechanical control methods improves effectiveness, reduces reliance on a single herbicide, and helps manage the risk of resistance. If you would like support developing an IWMP for your farm, contact the team at BPS.

SRA have conducted pot trials with a number of pre-emergent products that are already registered in cane. Soil was collected from the Burdekin – a clay and a delta loam – as was the sorghum seed. Several of these products and mixes provided very good control in the pot trials (see Table 1). The next step will be field trials using the same products.

Table 1: Results of SRA Pot Trials (information courtesy of SRA)

Product	Active Ingredient/s	Rate (g or mL/ha)	Efficacy (%)	
			Clay	Delta
Palmero TX	Isoxaflutole & Terbuthylazine	2000	100	100
Balance (½ rate) + Tressel	Isoxaflutole + Hexazinone	150 + 2000	100	100
Mentor WG	Metribuzin	2000	100	100
Barrage	Diuron & Hexazinone	4000	100	100
Treflan	Trifluralin	3000	100	100
Balance	Isoxaflutole	300	100	100
Bobcat i-maxx	Imazapic & Hexazinone	630	100	99.4
Dual Gold	Metolachlor	2500	99.5	100
Amitron 700	Amicarbazone	1000	92.5	96.3
Blaze + Balance (both ½ rate)	Imazapic + Isoxaflutole	200 + 150	91.6	96.9
Valor	Flumioxazin	700	79	91
Blaze	Imazapic	400	57	95.7
Stomp Xtra	Pendimethalin	3300	61.6	11.8

WEATHER STATIONS

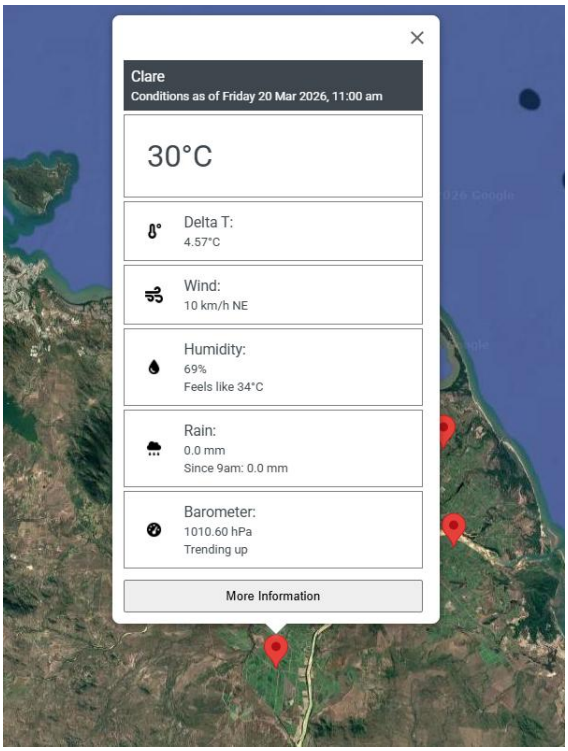
We are now in the process of installing the new weather stations across the Burdekin. Because we have 2 fewer weather stations compared to the last network, not all of the locations will be the same. However we have tried to ensure that we have a good spread of sites across the Burdekin.

So far, we have installed 8 out of 12 and they are live on our website for growers to view.

The remaining units will be installed shortly. Each station records a range of key weather parameters including rainfall, temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, and Delta T.

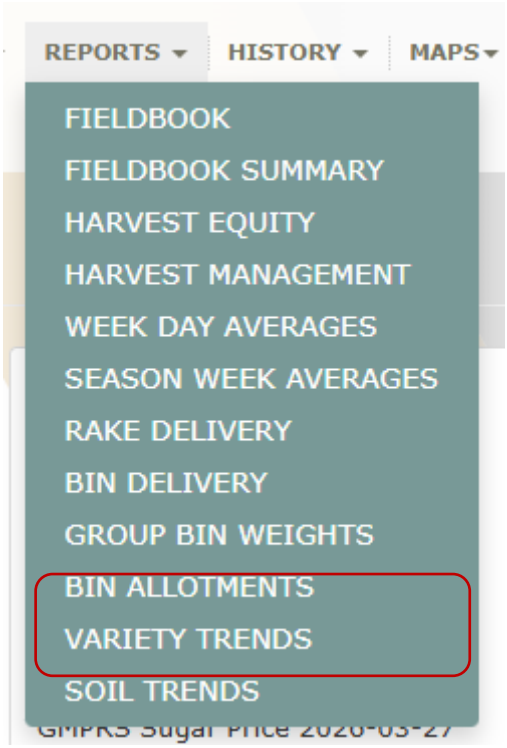
Having access to this sort of local, real-time data can really help with day-to-day decisions out in the paddock. Have a look and start making use of it, and if you've got any feedback or suggestions, feel free to get in touch.

To access the stations, click on the link on the BPS home page and select the weather station you want to see data for. To see *More Information*, use the Username: BPSgrowers and Password: BPSgrowers



NEW REPORTS IN GROWERWEB

Wilmar have recently added a couple of new reporting options into GrowerWeb. These are Variety Trends and Soil Trends, and they can be found at the bottom of the Reports drop down list.



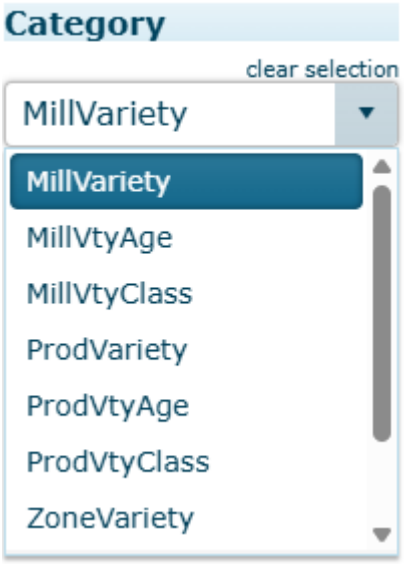
Each of these reports has a range of options available within it allowing you to filter to different criteria. For example, within the variety trends the data can be examined at the mill, productivity group (all), or zone (Burdekin) level. At these higher levels all crop classes are combined into a single number for each variety.

These reports are listed as:

- MillVariety
- ProdVariety, and
- ZoneVariety

To look deeper into the numbers, choose one of the other report options. For example, MillVtyAge shows each variety at each mill, but separated into plant and ratoon. Choosing MillVtyClass will break it down further into each crop class.

It is also possible to look at just a single variety by selecting the chosen variety from the drop down list under Variety on the right hand side of the page.



The Soil Trends report is broken down into similar options. Again it is possible to look deeper into variety performance on different soil types within your productivity group.

As with the Variety Trends report the soils reports can also be filtered by soil type and variety.

As the season progresses the data in these reports will be updated weekly. Along with the season to date yield results (tonnes cane per hectare, CCS and tonnes sugar/ha) they will show the area harvested, the area remaining and the per centage of the supply.

STAFF CONTACTS

Contact	Title	Contact Number	Email
Office		07 4783 1101	reception@bps.net.au
210 Old Clare Road, Ayr, QLD, 4807			
PO Box 237, Ayr, QLD, 4807			
Rob Milla	Manager	0490 036 329	rmilla@bps.net.au
Elliott Gullotta	Commercial Manager	0427 834 800	egullotta@bps.net.au
Marian Davis	Extension Agronomist	0428 927 079	mdavis@bps.net.au
Jasmine Girgenti	Extension Agronomist	0438 934 601	jgirgenti@bps.net.au
Kristine Patti	Extension Agronomist	0447 069 887	kpatti@bps.net.au
Asha Gould	Extension Agronomist	0447 209 152	agould@bps.net.au
Wayne Johnstone	Field Officer – Inkerman	0407 960 057	wjohnstone@bps.net.au
Maddy Muguira	Field Officer – Invicta	0407 167 159	mmuguira@bps.net.au
Rina Patane	Field Officer – Invicta	0472 702 693	rpatane@bps.net.au
Jack Edwards	Field Officer – Pioneer	0439 375 411	jedwards@bps.net.au
Anna Greenland	Extension Agronomist / Field Officer - Kalamia	0428 242 537	agreenland@bps.net.au
Cameryn Koia	Trainee		ckoia@bps.net.au