

Planting cane without effective grub control is a waste of time and money

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PLANTING and growing sugarcane is an expensive process when you take into account the cost of planting, fertiliser, weed control and irrigation.

But all of that investment is a waste of time and money if it doesn't include an effective canegrub control program, according to Burdekin grower Robert Rossiter.

The Rossiter family farm knows the impact that canegrubs have on cane farming income - after suffering losses of \$80,000 per year through lost yield, and having to replant due to grub damage.

In the mid 1990s they were faced with the heartbreak of declining production, and with no effective means of controlling cane grubs and optimising their investment in the crop.

Robert Rossiter: "Back in 1994 we started to get some canegrub infestation. By 1999/2000 we had got to the point that production had declined from a peak of 59 tonnes/acre down to 45 tonnes/acre.

"It was heartbreaking. We had been increasing yields, then we struck trouble - yields started to go off, and we couldn't keep the cane in the ground.

"All the money and effort that we'd put into the crop was a waste, because we didn't have anything effective to use on plant cane to protect the crop from canegrub damage.

"Along with other farmers, we took part in canegrub control trials. We started using suSCon Maxi under permit on our plant cane - and have been using it on plant cane every year since.

"It's made so much difference to our crop yield and income, I can't understand why anyone would leave it out of their planting program.

"Our Killie Road area has become a canegrub hot spot, so without an effective control program you're wasting your time planting cane.

"We're now back up to 55 tonnes/acre since we have been able to use suSCon Maxi in our plant cane - which we have found protects the crop during the plant year, first ratoon and maybe some benefit in the second ratoon.

"While more expensive per application, suSCon Maxi granules have provided us with a reliable, lasting way to insure our crop against yield loss or a replant due to grubs."

A major issue for growers in areas with severe canegrub problems - such as the good river loam soils of the Burdekin - is the infestation threat from properties without an effective grub control program.

Canegrub beetles hatch from breeding areas under cane and fly through the area, putting pressure on all neighbouring cane crops.

Cane beetles remind farmers of their threat to cane crops as they fly through the district from October to January.

The Rossiter family has an assigned area of 170 acres of sugarcane, and a reliable water supply.

However, the likely better prices this coming season will be offset by expected lower yields, due to harvesting delays last season. The crop was cut too late for ratoons to get away.

Robert Rossiter: "That's put the crop one and a half months behind, so yields will be impacted - but not as badly as the impact of uncontrolled canegrubs."

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