

Planting Cane Without Effective Grub Control A Waste of Time and Money

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With the price of sugar on the rise, Burdekin canegrower Robert Rossiter is keen to maximise cane yields during the predicted high-price years ahead.

However the rising price for sugar is being accompanied by a rise in fuel, fertiliser and weed-control costs, and by rising canegrub numbers in his Pioneer district.

Robert Rossiter: "When the sugar price and the cost of crop inputs are rising, it's important to make sure we cover every base in crop management. That includes effective canegrub control.

"With grub damage, our farm's tonnages have been down to 95-100 tonnes/ha. Since we've been using the longer term suSCon Maxi granules on plant cane, we are now averaging 138 tonnes/ha."

With an assigned area of nearly 70 hectares of cane, and a reliable water supply, that 38% increase in average tonnage means a potential increased harvest of 2600 tonnes from the farm.

Robert Rossiter: "We had been steadily increasing yields, then in 1994 we struck trouble - yields started to go off. 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.

"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.

"We believe that if you do everything right to grow a good cane crop - but leave out the suSCon Maxi at planting - you're wasting time and money.

"But with years of low sugar prices, many growers have stopped using suSCon Maxi on their plant cane.

"You can see the results of that - increasing cane grub pressure around the district. The amount of cane beetle flights we saw late last year made us aware that some people are not controlling canegrubs effectively, and are contributing to increased canegrub numbers in the district's crop."

The Rossiters are finding that suSCon Maxi on plant cane is looking after the plant cane, first and second ratoons at least.

"We usually like to have an early plant to draw canegrubs to the area that's been treated.

"But with cane grub pressure increasing around the district again, we may also have to treat some of the ratoon crop this year to stop flights (from the end of August to the end of November).

"If we cut early in the season and ratoons are looking good at beetle flight times, that's

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when we would consider treating with a liquid grub control.”

If any link in a chain is weak, the chain is easily broken.

“The two weak links for us in the Burdekin at the moment are the impact of canegrubs on our tonnages, and mill unreliability.

“The 2007 extended crushing season let our potentially good 2008 crop down; once again the 2008 crushing has now limited the potential of our 2009 crop. Unreliability of milling facilities in the region meant the 2008 crop was not harvested at the optimum time, and subsequent 2009 ratoon crops around the district are very small. It would be really nice to be able to optimise all the dollars we put in per hectare, but that hasn’t happened with mill breakdowns and shutdowns during the season.

“This season has also been very wet – with 860mm through February and the likelihood of more rain to come. The crop looks alright, but has had very little sun to get it growing. “That – combined with a lot of late ratoons due to harvest delays – means 2009 crop yields are likely to be down.”



Third generation Burdekin canegrower Robert Rossiter has lifted production on the family farm back up to 138 tonnes/ha - from a low of 95 tonnes/ha due to cane grub damage. Inclusion of canegrub control granules suSCon Maxi at planting has insured his crop investment over three years. “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.”

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