



STRIVING FOR SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH SMARTCANE BMP

By John Barbetti
Smartcane BMP Facilitator - Tableland

Adaptability has been key to the Rankine family's farming success. From operating the north's largest saw mill in the heyday of timber industry to moving into cattle and mixed cropping when north Queensland's timber trade wound up in the late-80s, through to **Doug Rankine's** decision to plant cane in 1995 when the Tableland sugar industry was in its infancy - the family has never shied away from new challenges.

It is this ability to adapt that has seen the family embrace practice change and new technologies in recent years in a bid to lower costs and improve production through better weed, pest and irrigation management.

A willingness to take on big challenges also contributed to the decision by Doug's son, **Benjamin**, to pack in an engineering career and return to Atherton with his family to help his dad and mum, **Suzanne**, run the family farm.

Benjamin, who had been working in the resources sector, has been on a steep learning curve since returning in 2018, but is enjoying the challenge.

His wife **Renee**, and their three boys **Lachlan 7, Tristan 5 and Leighton 4**, are also relishing their new environment and the natural surrounds.

Drones are used for crop inspections for pest control, growth and growth variations, vine infestations, grub damage, pivot irrigator problems and pig activity.

"It's been a good change from the corporate world to a family business," Benjamin said.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY

While crop rotation and fallow management form part of a pest and disease management plan, technology, in the form of a drone, has now been incorporated into the Rankine's management practices.

Drones are used for crop inspections for pest control, growth and growth variations, vine infestations, grub damage, pivot irrigator problems and pig activity.

Cockatoos are a major pest for the Rankine's fallow crops – especially peanuts and maize.

Drones are used to scare off the birds and monitor flock movements before they enter the crop.



WATER MANAGEMENT

Water security is of concern to Doug, who sees increased demand from other agricultural industries in the Mareeba Dimbulah Irrigation Area.

Managing this finite resource is critical to achieving productivity and viability across their mixed enterprises.

The Smartcane BMP irrigation and drainage management module completed by the Rankine's as part of their accreditation ensures that the use of irrigation water is considered and meets best practice.

Accredited growers are required to calculate the soil moisture and crop water requirements before deciding on the amount of water to be applied.

Run-off is managed to prevent unnecessary losses of both water and sediment.

The Rankine family uses enviroscan and irrigweb technology to monitor and record their irrigation activities.

ACCREDITATION

The Rankine family achieved Smartcane BMP accreditation in April 2019.

Whilst the business' aim has always been to drive efficiencies, and by default,

deliver best practice, Smartcane BMP has brought an added focus to how the farm operations interact more broadly beyond the farm gate.

Benjamin sees the future of Smartcane BMP continuing to evolve; to incorporate more practices for key fallow crops, to complete the cane growing system and deliver a program that further meets the needs of dynamic growers. ■

Tree change: Renee and Benjamin moved back to the Rankine family farm with their boys (L-R) Leighton, Lachlan and Tristan in 2018. Before that, Benjamin's parents Suzanne and Doug (opposite) had managed the farm alone.