QUEENSLANDERS SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE SUGAR

By Kate Gowdie
Smartcane BMP Manager

Queenslanders are proud of their iconic sugarcane crop, according to the results of a recent survey run by the industry's best practice farming program, Smartcane BMP.

More than 80% of community respondents to the survey recognised sugarcane as being good for Queensland.

Almost 70% of respondents said they believed that sugarcane should be farmed sustainably in order to protect the environment, including the Great Barrier Reef, a call Queensland growers are heeding with their commitment to Smartcane BMP.

It's clear there is extraordinary community support for cane growers from the people of rural and regional Queensland, who appreciate the positive contribution cane growing makes to the state's agricultural sector and the local economy.

Since 2014, the industry has run its Smartcane Best Management Practice (Smartcane BMP) program for growers to demonstrate their stewardship of the land and commitment to positive environmental outcomes. Accreditation is evidence for industry, consumers and the community alike that these credentials are being satisfied.

It's clear there is extraordinary community support for cane growers from the people of rural and regional Queensland.

We know cane growers already look after the environment because it's their greatest resource. Smartcane BMP gives growers a way to demonstrate this to the community, government and corporate sector. We want growers to know that their community supports them and wants to see the industry become more sustainable to ensure its long-term viability.

There are around 4,000 farming businesses across the state's cane growing regions. So far, over 150,000 hectares representing 37% of cane growing land is accredited by Smartcane BMP, with growers seeing the benefits through productivity, profitability and sustainability.

We know there are many more growers who are growing cane at or above industry standard and we encourage them to consider accreditation so their efforts can be formally recognised by industry and community alike.

Smartcane BMP accreditation is not about creating more work for growers, but instead helping to document what they are already doing and finding efficiencies through that process. There remains many 'myths' amongst the growing community about exactly what Smartcane BMP accreditation entails.

One of the program's key mottos is "Your Farm, Your Way." Accreditation can be achieved across a range of farming systems, so long as the minimum standards are met. There is no exam required to achieve accreditation.

The first step towards reaching accreditation is to Benchmark – this is where growers assess their current practices against industry standards by answering a series of questions in conjunction with their local facilitator.

Facilitators can then undertake a pre-audit where they gather examples and evidence that will be required at audit. Once the facilitator is satisfied a grower has all the required evidence, they will arrange for an audit with the third-party auditor.

Over 150,000 hectares representing 37% of cane growing land is accredited by Smartcane BMP.

This process follows the same process as the pre-audit and many growers comment how 'easy' the audit was compared with their expectations. By working with facilitators along the way, a lot of the hard work and anxiety can be removed.

The value of Smartcane accreditation is different for each grower. For many, recognition is priceless, for others it is about making efficiencies that deliver financial gains. For example, one farm's adoption of best practices resulted in savings of up to $250/ha.

With the eyes of our community upon us, we have our sights set on accrediting 40% of the cane area by the end of 2022 and Queensland's sugarcane farmers are being urged to work together to reach this milestone.

The good news is that there is help at hand. Smartcane BMP has facilitators in every cane growing region who are passionate about working with growers to help you achieve accreditation. Visit the Smartcane BMP website to find your nearest facilitator: https://smartcane.com.au ∎

SMARTCANE BMP