

RODNEY'S STORY

A CENTURY OF CATTLE AND CANE

Utilising technology key to managing soils, water and nutrients.

For Herbert RP161 grower and fourth generation sugarcane farmer Rodney Robino, technology is the pathway to better managing his soils and nutrient applications on his farm.

Rodney's family began farming in the Braemeadows area 103 years ago and today farms sugarcane and a small herd of beef cattle. A fitter-welder by trade, returning to the family farm was always something Rodney had planned to do.

"I grew up working around heavy machinery, doing some mechanic work, then hauling out and mining and eventually I started my own earthworks business, but I always kept an interest in farming. I grew up on the farm, I have friends that farm and I really like working with the machinery."

Like many other growers who took part in the Herbert RP161 project, Rodney joined the project out of a need to better understand and manage his regulatory requirements, but soon discovered that the project had much more to offer than just a rubber stamp.

"I read a lot of stuff about the regulations and what I need to do on my farm to be compliant, but it wasn't until I started working with HCPSL staff on the (Herbert RP161) project that I could join all the dots.

After working with Shannon and Adam (project staff) I soon realised that the project could help me apply technology to better manage ameliorant and



Rodney Robino on the family farm.

fertiliser applications across the farm."

"We generally don't suffer from the dry, our biggest problem here is the water and what it does with our heavy clays. Using technology is key to managing some of these issues. Years ago everything was done by eye but now it's all laser leveling to better control the movement of water, which aside from improving the crop also helps with controlling any erosion and movement of sediment from a block."

"Working with the Herbert RP161 team has also allowed me to understand why, when, and where I need to take soil samples. Before, dad and my uncle would go out and take a sample once all the grass and beans had been worked in, but now I understand that that's not the right way to do it because it's too contaminated with organic matter.

Using electro-magnetic (EM) mapping and GPS location I can be more precise when taking soil samples on different soil types or changes in my soil like sodic patches."

This project is funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program and the Australian Government's Reef Trust.

"It's great because it means that I now understand why some areas grow more cane than others and I can now be more precise with my ameliorant and fertiliser applications to try to fix that."

Rodney believes that developing a tailored whole farm nutrient management plan (NMP) with project staff was critical in helping him better manage his nutrients. The NMP also assisted with a recent audit by Reef regulation compliance officers.

"I've just been through an audit (compliance) and the plan (NMP) is the best thing I could of ever had to help me get through it. When they (compliance officers) came out I brought out my plan (NMP) and they were overwhelmed by the level of information and records I had. I had everything in one place, so whatever they wanted to know was in that book (NMP). It was a big weight off my shoulders because these people (compliance officers) show up looking for that information and I didn't have to remember where I'd scribbled it down."

Something else Rodney found extremely useful when it came to managing his farm inputs were the Farming 4 CASH™ workshops that staff delivered throughout the project.

"I gained a real understanding of how important lime is to improve your soil. Almost everyone knows that you need to

put lime on, but when you understand why you put the lime on, you understand the importance of it. A lot of people do things because their fathers did it, and their fathers before them, but when you ask them why they say, because that's just what you do. I've always been a 'why' person, so the workshops answered a lot of questions for me."

When asked what the most positive thing he's done on his farm since doing the Herbert RP161 project Rodney circled back to soil sampling.

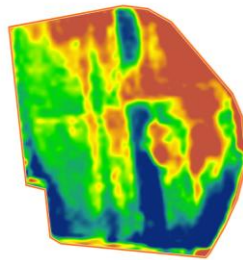
"That's easy, taking better soil tests. Before I did the project, I used to think that soils were all the same, but now I realise they're not. When you're taking multiple soil samples according to recommendations based on EM mapping or different soils you see the differences. It takes out a lot of the guessing with ameliorants and fertilisers."

When it came to providing advice to other growers who are yet to do an NMP, Rodney had this to say.

"Doing the (Herbert RP161) project and a nutrient plan really has taken away the stress for me. Everyone gets to planting or harvesting time and they're still trying to work out what fertiliser they need. So often they just get whatever they can or whatever they used last year. With the nutrient plan I can sit down in the slack period and decide what I need, when I need it and what it's going to cost me, I can even shop around to find the best deal and save some money when ordering fertiliser."



Rodney uses EM mapping (left) and NDVI images (below) to better manage his soils, nutrients and his crop.



Rodney Robino overlooking a waterway adjacent to his farm.

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