

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

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. But 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.

“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,” says Robert. “That includes effective canegrub control.

“With grub damage, our farm’s tonnages have been down to 95–100 tonnes per hectare. Since we’ve been using the longer term suSCon Maxi granules on plant cane, we are now averaging 138 tonnes per hectare.”

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

“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



Burdekin canegrower Robert Rossiter has lifted production back up to 138 tonnes per hectare – from a low of 95 tonnes per hectare due to cane grub damage.

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, it 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 grub control 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 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 860 mm 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.” ■

SUSCON MAXI UPDATE

Depth of placement of suSCon Maxi granules in the soil is not as important as it was for growers using suSCon Blue for cane grub control.

Researchers believe this is likely to be because imidacloprid – the active ingredient in suSCon Maxi – has a different mode of action, and is more mobile in the soil than chlorpyrifos.

10 cm soil cover

Covering the granules with 10 cm of soil cover is still very important – even though depth of placement is not as critical for good grub control.

In line with these results, Crop Care will apply to the APVMA to amend the current label to reflect a more flexible approach to product placement, which should be of practical assistance to growers.

The research finding was made in a number of regions during Crop Care’s ongoing extensive research program with the BSES.

These trials provide updated information on existing registered products, as well as looking at new suSCon formulations for controlling cane grubs – including new active ingredients.

Three year control

Another important research result from trials over the last few years will enable Crop Care to apply to the APVMA for three-year control of Southern one-year grub – for those growers who are battling with this pest.

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