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Hello!

Welcome back to our latest Catalyst communiqué.
We have so much to share with you this month I don't know where to begin.
Be sure to add our new email address to receive uninterrupted connection to information and invitations, or contribute a story. comms@projectcatalyst.net.au
(PLEASE check your junk or spam folder for previous deliveries)

Still reeling from the shocking news of losing one of our best-known Catalyst family members tragically last month, I remain grateful to all contributors, especially our 'On Ground Service Providers', who've shared their stories and new content.

Robert and Leanne Bonassi obviously felt the winter chill in Ingham, lighting the infamous Project Catalyst branded brazier, for the first time since winning it in Townsville 2021.
Thank you for the great pics! We look forward to seeing you in Cairns.

Joanne Gibbs who ensured all our Annual Forums ran smoothly since 2011, (and that you are treated like VIP's) – joined the team at Farmacist Mackay late 2021 and recently connected me with their newly appointed Communications and Technical Officer, Richelle Kelly – you can read all the latest from their Central and North Qld teams here.
(We'll introduce you to Richelle in a coming issue.)
This month we wanted to know more about who's filling the shoes of 'Andrew Rouse' – with WWF-Australia selecting the passionate and experienced Sharelle Polack, who once delivered Paddock to Reef projects with the Qld Department of Agriculture and is pleased to be working with like-minded Project Catalyst growers.

The Nutrien Ag team have been proactive in the Mackay Whitsunday region rolling out a series of workshops; Annette Corcoran loves to capture the moments, submitting a story and photos.

From Burdekin Productivity Services, Jasmine Girgenti (nee Connolly, CONGRATS!!) talks about Burdekin growers embracing new software to simplify everything from irrigation to record-keeping.

Further north in the Wet Tropics Herbert Cane Productivity Services Limited continue to leverage the brains trust, through workshop discussions about drone application capabilities.

and some sad news as our Project Catalyst growers pay tribute to Mario Raccanello, whose life was tragically taken in June, after a tractor accident on his new property where he planned to retire with wife Franca. I will always remember him as a giant of his community and passionate advocate of Catalyst. Our hearts and minds remain with his family at this difficult time.

Kim Kleidon
Communication Specialist

Communication and Grower Engagement

In the last quarter our team have been busy connecting with Mackay Whitsunday communities, conducting five Project Catalyst Shed Meetings in April this year. Grower support in Proserpine, Kolijo, Eton, Koumala and Carmila is encouraging and we welcome new enquiries from growers in the region.

Our guest speakers Ian Leonard – Nutrien/Loveland – Technical Services Manager Plant Nutrition, Gerry Dogao – DLF Seeds (Central & Northern Qld), and Dan Gonzales – DAF presented the latest information about crop nutrition, mixed species varieties and trial results, fielding some interesting questions.

We also attended the biggest one day show; Pioneer Valley Agricultural Show on June 12th 2022 and Mackay Agricultural Show 14th-16th June with displays and informational material to connect with people in the regions Agricultural sector.

Annette Corcoran
Project Officer - Nutrien Ag Solutions

Supporting you to achieve more

Having trouble keeping all your records? We are helping growers improve their farm business and management, and meet their regulatory requirements by supplying software tools like Agtrix and IrrigWeb *free* to our members.

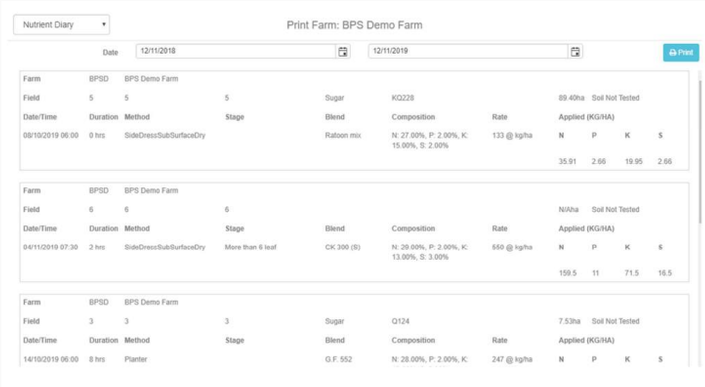
Agtrix allows you to keep nutrient, planting, cultivation, and chemical records in one place. It has an interactive map layer that allows growers to select blocks and record activities. Entering your farm records is an intuitive and simple process, ***(see images below)*** fully supported on all modern internet browsers and does not require any special downloads.
It is also supported by an app with a simplified version of the program operated from your phone. We are very conscious that some growers may not wish to share their data, hence the data is securely held and not available to anyone other than the grower. If you'd like to update your record keeping, we will happily assist with set-up and use. https://agtrix.com/

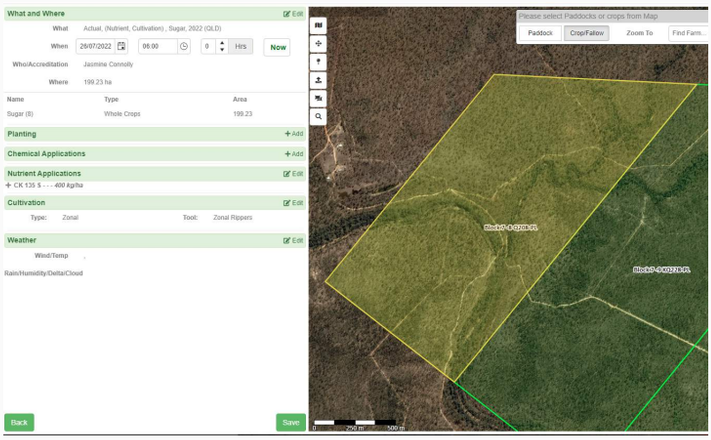
Irrigweb assists with irrigation scheduling and as a recording tool designed for cane farming. The program provides you with an irrigation schedule that considers soil type properties such as water holding capacity, and current weather conditions such as solar radiation, rainfall, wind and evapotranspiration. This information along with irrigation inputs and details about your crop's age, helps to build an informative model based on your farm's individual parameters to provide an accurate schedule.

There is an easy map function which allows you to login and record an irrigation easily, or see if the crop needs to be watered within the next couple of days. If you need help calculating irrigation inputs, we'd love to help. Discover more at http://www.irrigweb.com/

Are you meeting the recognised industry standard?
Smartcane BMP provides accreditation in three core modules in soil health and nutrition, irrigation practices and weed/pest management. An opportunity to show your farming practices in these three modules are at, or above a recognised industry standard. The program is voluntary, and you are assisted throughout by a local BMP facilitator, to guide you on best management practices and a variety of record keeping tools. Register online at http://www.smartcane.com.au

Jasmine Girgenti
Extension Officer





Introducing Sharelle Polack WWF-Australia

Project Catalyst Team Profile
Sharelle Polack – WWF-Australia

Living in a variety of locations within Australia and overseas, shapes experience and perspective. Sharelle, who witnessed a diversity of approaches to life and living has always been interested in how people interact with nature and their local landscapes, especially when it comes to producing food. “When we were living in Palau (North Pacific) my children were little, local agricultural produce was sometimes limited and most food was imported. Making it challenging to find nutritious food.”

Food is common to us all and eating is something we do daily, yet for some it can be more challenging. With a rich background in land management and agriculture, working with 800 people, managing 21 gardens in Melbourne seven years ago, provided an opportunity to connect on many levels.
“It was a privilege working with public housing communities from diverse cultures which was reflected in the biodiversity of the crops they grew in the community gardens. It was also great to see the benefits for people, including children, growing food, getting their hands in the soil, and connecting with nature even in very urban landscapes.”

As an Agricultural Research Officer volunteering in Vanuatu (2017) Sharelle witnessed the challenges, we all face in relation to the changing climate. “Vanuatu is the most disaster-prone country in the world and is dealing with severe impacts of climate change. This makes growing food very challenging with natural disasters and changing seasons and pests.”

With more than 50% of the world population living in cities, in Sharelle's experience the greatest challenge we face is access to, and affordability of, nutritious food. She understands that globally for many people this is a major issue and when the costs of living go up, food spending is reduced. "Covid highlighted the challenge of fragile supply chains and the difficulties for some cities to supply food to their people."

Food security is a challenge we share responsibility for and all play a role in as a society. Farmers play a key role in environmental management as stewards of 58% of Australia's land, and Project Catalyst is a leading light for improved practice change. "Working for the Department of Agriculture in Queensland, one of the projects I supported was Paddock to Reef so it is great to be involved with a project that is also applying those principles of improving practices for better water quality."

It's no surprise that Sharelle spends most of her free time outdoors, bushwalking, bike riding and camping. Things many of us enjoy, I think that Peter Becke will have a few locations to share with Sharelle at Forum 2023!

FARMACIST

A new era for farm record keeping

In the evolving agricultural climate where complete and timely records are essential, we've been searching for a way to streamline communications between growers and the events that happen on their farm. Our solution is a platform for growers to manage their own data in an easy and accessible way. A spatial record-keeping system that aims to provide a good balance between complexity and compliance, it includes features like input recording, block management and reporting for an all-inclusive farm management system.

Beta-testing for ***Farmacist Connect*** **-** the record-keeping website and app, is underway in the Burdekin where growers can work closely with our IT Coordinator Dylan, who's been developing the platform for five years!

Designed for any grower interested in viewing their farm spatially and electronically, the app currently supports sugar cane, legume, and banana cropping, but the software will be developed further to include a larger variety of crops and applications. Growers trialing the software will help shape the existing features before its release.

Audits are a hot-topic and enough to make growers sweat, so this program aims to ensure compliance and streamline data storage. The program operates from a spatial perspective, so you can see your farm from satellite imagery. Once data layers are applied, you can see exactly what information and records align with what block and/or farm.

At the first release, growers will be able to record the chemical, nutrient and irrigation events, but the scope for what *Farmacist Connect* can grow to encompass is what we're most excited about. Features like financial recording and yields, worker tracking, tractor GPS imports, equipment management, NMP budget tracker and more are already planned.

For more information, and to see what else Farmacist has been up to lately, see our latest newsletter at farmacist.com.au/resources, or email info@farmacist.com.au.

Catchment Solutions

Top - Rachel Clancy, Jaylan Smith and Jo Gibbs
Left - Matt Moore Fisheries Ecologist. Right - Kim Kleidon shares a joke with Royce Bishop.

Catchment Solutions is celebrating its 10th birthday this month!

It's a milestone we are very proud of, and wanted to reflect on our history, growth, and the connection with Project Catalyst.

Originally launched as Reef Catchment Solutions in 2012 (see images above), our involvement with Project Catalyst began in a small way initially, until 2016 when we successfully secured Reef Trust III funding from the Australian Federal Government, allowing us to expand the program to work with more than 100 sugar cane growers across the three catchment regions.

Innovation field trials continued, and Broader Adoption validation programs were introduced to share and roll out the positive trial results with the industry.

Ongoing support through vital funding with project partner the Coca-Cola Foundation through WWF-Australia have ensured a consistent delivery of the Project Catalyst program over the years.

In 2017 we designed and launched the Project Catalyst website which now hosts all trial reports, case studies, video presentations, newsletters, and annual forum magazines; a valuable information resource accessible to everyone.

More recently, we were able to secure two four-year funding programs through the Great Barrier Reef Foundation (GBRF), and with their support an additional 64 growers will be assisted in implementing positive practice changes on their farms.

Our most recent additions to the Project Catalyst communications program include the launch of the Facebook page and a series of informative Podcasts hosted on the YouTube page where you'll find five years of video stories. We aim to keep providing you all with ongoing opportunities to participate in Project Catalyst and access this wealth of information.

A huge thank you to all of the growers who have been involved over the years and who continue to support the program, our funding partners that make it all possible, the On Ground Service Providers who interact with the growers every day, and the Catchment Solutions team working so hard behind the scenes. Watch our latest video from Kim and Jac highlighting the transformation of Marklands Station ponded pastures, now hosting diadromous fish like Barra, and improving stocks for anglers.

Andrew Campbell
General Manager
Catchment Solutions

HCPSL
Herbert Cane Productivity Services Ltd.

Update on Technologies – a Project Catalyst Workshop

Developments in drone technologies show potential for precision product application of herbicides and crop ripeners at a block level. Discussion at a recent workshop touched on the potential for the drone functionality in timing and application of products across smaller blocks, as well as the challenging grey areas around chemical licencing where legislation is yet to catch up with technology.

Latest CCS testing for Catalyst and other Ingham growers who have used ripeners indicates they have been effective in improving CCS to this point in the season. The future of precision agriculture within sugarcane remains an important area of exploration.

The informational workshop for growers on novel applications of existing technologies to manage pests, apply products and map soils proved productive. The workshop invited all growers in the Herbert and Tully catchments looking to address pest pressure from rats and pigs, as well as those growers looking to apply crop ripening products at a block level.

Presenting on developments in drone applications was Travis Van Dooren. Travis has been involved in the design of a new drone-based tool for efficient placement of rat baits on-farm. The tool has the potential to help growers act promptly where early indications show increased rat pressure for the coming year.

The update also touched on work we've undertaken to explore the capabilities of infrared drone cameras for monitoring feral pigs. Project Squealer is a Queensland Feral Pest Initiative (QFPI) funded program looking at new ways of managing feral pigs. The program commenced in late 2021 and in the early stages of the project HCPSL has been trailing the use of a drone for monitoring and identifying pigs.

Bethany Donker
Extension Agronomist

TRIBUTE TO MARIO RACCANELLO

– A GENEROUS GIANT, leaving a lasting legacy. KK

RAY Zamora will remember Mario as big man with a big heart.
"Mario never did anything in small measures always to the max. A harder worker I've never met, always striving for more performance with better environmental outcomes. At the end of a day's work, he left nothing in his tank. He will be sadly missed by Project Catalyst people but definitely not forgotten. RIP.

ROBERT Bonassi feels like he knew Mario his whole life.

"From the first time I met you at my first Catalyst conference, I knew Catalyst was more than just farmers sharing ideas, it was a family. As this family grew and many of us grew closer, I really got to see your passion for farming, soil health and your drive for innovation. You were an inspiration to me, you taught me so much about soil health, your passion for farming and always giving 110%, encouraging me and giving me the confidence to speak up and ask questions.
Fond memories remain of us, Leanne and Franca sharing many good times together, outside of Catalyst.
I'll never forget the time we both got called on stage at the Magnetic Island Theatre Restaurant, Me due to my loud shirt and you because of your larger-than-life presence.
It was an honour and a pleasure to get to know you Mario, and your family.
Thank you, rest in peace mate.

GERRY Deguara hit it off with Mario immediately through Catalyst over a decade ago.
"He was a man with great passion for innovation. I admired his dedication to adopting new things and always being involved in sharing what he learned. We enjoyed a similar sense of humour and he was always good natured when I'd muck around - not long back when Barbara and I travelled up north, we stopped in to see Mario and Franca's new block. They weren't there and the house was still under construction, so I rang him and asked if I could use his toilet. We will miss him for the rest of our days."

Robert Bonassi, Gerry Deguara, Ray Zamora, Tom Gilbert, Sergio Fighera, Michael Waring, Willy Lucas, Gino Zatta.
Toasting Mario on his new block the day of his funeral.

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