

Best-practice nutrient management

The SIX EASY STEPS Approach

Introduction

Modification of the traditional nutrient-management guidelines for sugarcane production in Australia has been in progress for the past 10 years. The need for change occurred with a realisation that nutrient management should no longer only target sugarcane yields, but should be aimed at sustainability.

Increased study and research has led to a better understanding of soil types and appropriate nutrient application rates.

This research has also resulted in the nutrient management guidelines being more soil-specific by taking into account basic soil attributes such as colour, texture, position in the landscape, and chemical properties.

These modified guidelines have been incorporated into a grower-friendly nutrient management program branded the 'SIX EASY STEPS' approach to improved nutrient management.

What does sustainable and best-practice nutrient management mean?

Nutrient management in the sugar industry should be aimed at sustainability. This means that profitable cane production needs to be achieved in combination with the maintenance of soil fertility on-farm and minimal off-site effects.

In simple terms we should continue to consider our 'back pockets' when planning nutrient inputs, but we should also be maintaining our farm resources for future generations, and caring for the larger environment by not applying excessive amounts of nutrients.

Best-practice nutrient management means having the best chance of success in minimising the risk of losses in productivity (loss of yield), profitability (loss of income), nutrients (leaching, run-off and/or gaseous losses) and soil resources (erosion and fertility losses).

Farm-specific nutrient-management plans based on the SIX EASY STEPS will enable adoption of best-practice nutrient management in sugarcane production.

What is the SIX EASY STEPS program?

The SIX EASY STEPS program is an integrated nutrient management tool that enables the adoption of best practice nutrient management on-farm. It consists of:

1. Knowing and understanding your soils.
2. Understanding and managing nutrient process and losses.
3. Regular soil testing.
4. Adopting soil-specific nutrient management guidelines.
5. Checking on the adequacy of nutrient inputs (eg leaf analyses).
6. Keeping good records to modify nutrient inputs when and where necessary.

The SIX EASY STEPS program is being delivered to industry through a grower-orientated short-course entitled 'Accelerating the adoption of best-practice nutrient management.'

The overall objective of the program is to provide guidelines on how to implement balanced nutrition on-farm with the ultimate aim of optimising productivity and profitability, without adversely influencing soil fertility or causing off-farm effects. It is also aimed at giving growers the required skills to develop nutrient management plans for their farms.

For further information on the SIX EASY STEPS program please contact your local adviser.

