

Growers and harvester operators invited to take part in harvesting demonstration trials

Sugarcane growers and harvester operators are invited to see first-hand how they could avoid losing valuable sugar from mechanical harvesting by participating in real-world harvesting research demonstration trials.

Trials over many years have shown that there are potential losses of sugarcane and juice (sugar) from common harvester settings.

As part of a major integrated research and adoption program to help optimise harvest efficiency, sugarcane harvesting groups (growers and contract harvesters) are being offered the chance to see this research for themselves, in their own conditions and with their own machinery.

Program Coordinator Mr Bernard Milford said SRA was targeting about 10 percent of the harvest groups in each region for the coming 2017 harvest season.

These volunteer groups will collaborate to run a demonstration trial on one of the group's farms and review the results to decide whether measures need to be taken to reduce losses and what can be done.

"This project is designed to answer questions growers and harvester operators have about cane and juice loss with data and hard economics, specific to individual harvesting groups," Mr Milford said. "It will provide groups with the information to help optimise harvesting and on-going support through facilitated meetings and access to information."

SRA will run the trials to international scientific standards and will coordinate the activity with the mills. In some regions, the work will build on the significant investment by Wilmar Sugar and Mackay Area Productivity Services (MAPS). In Wilmar's mill areas, the trials will add staff to the equipment and personnel Wilmar is already using.

Similarly, in Mackay, the MAPS' equipment and MAPS' people will be brought into the action. "This practical assistance from Wilmar and MAPS, as well as the enthusiastic support already coming from many industry stakeholders, is vital in rolling out this ambitious project," Mr Milford said.

The trials will be coordinated at a local level by regional coordinating groups that will assist in recruiting and selecting the participating harvesting groups and arranging the logistics of the trials with the mill.

Growers or harvester operators who would like to be involved are invited to contact Mr Phil Patane of SRA on 0431 818 482.

The project is not recruiting harvest groups in NSW and the Burdekin in 2017; it will conduct further work in these areas this year to ensure that recommendations are appropriate for the burnt cane regions. This service is expected to be provided next season.

"We are reviewing the impact of Cyclone Debbie and will talk to local groups about which trials will be able to go ahead in the central region in the next few days," Mr Milford said.

The project is funded with assistance from SRA and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Rural R&D for Profit Programme.