Welcome to the first edition of Council’s Farming in Focus newsletter.

As agribusiness plays an essential role in our $2.1 billion economy we want to ensure you stay informed on what’s happening that may help you grow or value-add to your business.

The Burdekin Shire supports a variety of industries but its manufacturing that is at the top of our earners with an output of more than $700 million.

Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing, Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services, Construction and Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services follow to make the top five with retail trade not too far behind.

Council is proactive in pursuing sustainable economic development to create wealth, employment, educational opportunities and enhance the lifestyle of our residents and visitors.

To do this we are encouraging our producers to provide feedback on this publication and on what sort of articles would interest you for our future editions.

Council wants this publication to help foster a closer relationship with, and provide a mutually beneficial link to, our farming community by distributing valuable agricultural news from throughout the shire.

All too often the negatives outshine the positive work being done by residents in our Shire and it’s Council’s view that it is time this changed.

The Burdekin is home to about 1000 sugar and produce growers who employ 20 per cent of our population.

The district’s biggest agricultural export is the 8-9 million tonnes of sugar cane produced annually, from which 1.3 million tonnes of raw sugar is produced at the region’s four large-scale mills.

We have about 3400ha dedicated to horticultural use such as achachas, mangoes, melons, pumpkins, zucchinis, rice, soybeans, mung beans, sweet corn, beans, maize and cassava. There also are the emerging industries of agave and sorghum.

Our aquaculture industry is also growing. Local business Pacific Reef Fisheries (PRF) already produces up to 900 tonnes of premium Black Tiger Prawns annually. Their area of production has increased from 68ha to 98ha, allowing for 30 existing, one hectare ponds to be used as part of the operations.

The company is also farming 100-150 tonne of award-winning cobia annually, supplying Qantas first-class passengers and five-star restaurants in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. They are the only company in Australia farming cobia and have been selling commercially for about a year to top end Australian restaurants and Qantas.

Of course, the Burdekin’s most important asset is its water and Council is continually working with local water authorities to ensure there is adequate supply.

Our team welcomes your feedback and any ideas for future newsletters. We look forward to working with you to grow the Burdekin.

Cr Bill Lewis
Mayor
Use pulses to boost soil health, productivity

The Burdekin region is fortunate to have the ability to produce crops all year and there are some crops which can be used in rotation with our main crop sugar cane that boost soil health and your farm’s profitability. Blue Ribbon Grain and Pulses Manager James Hunt talks about these crops

Blue Ribbon Grain and Pulses actively procure Burdekin farmers to sow green mung beans (GMB), millets and soya beans in rotation with their sugar cane crop.

Two of the most suitable crops to use are GMB and soya bean.

The benefits of GMB are that it has a short growing season, is a legume and a good cash crop. Soya bean, also a legume, does well as a stand over/wet season crop.

Both are broad leaf plants which leave behind some nitrogen and also aid in the control of grass weeds.

Rotational farming can improve productivity and offers the farmer additional profitable crops to their calendar year.

There were record prices for GMB last season which has led to strong prices and demand again this season. Dry weather in southern Queensland and northern New South Wales has meant strong demand for soya beans and millets also.

GMB is one of the cheapest crops to grow as it is a low water use crop, requires minimal fertiliser and its growth cycle from planting to harvest is 90 days.

But rotating crops such as sugar cane and rice with legume crops is not just about the dollar return. These crops reduce the reliance on synthetic fertilisers to promote plant growth and increase soil health.

Pulse crops can easily fit into your existing farming system. If you only have a short time between two cane crops, GMB can be in and out quickly.

If you need maximum nitrogen return to the soil and a stand over crop for the wet season then soya beans will be suitable.

There are always risks involved with any crops, but with the correct management practices pulse crops can be a useful and profitable rotational tool.

There are other cropping options available and these can be discussed with your local agronomist and marketer Chris Richards on 0428 578 745.

Register to provide clarity on ownership

The Australian Government has announced that from July 1, 2015, all foreign investors who hold an interest in Australian agricultural land are required to advise the Australian Taxation Office.

These new requirements have been included in an updated version of Australia’s Foreign Investment Policy and are expected to become a legislative requirement by December 2015.

The policy changes require foreign investors to notify the ATO:

- By December 31, 2015, if they have an existing interest in Australian agricultural land
- Within 30 days if they acquire a new interest in Australian agricultural land
- If they cease owning Australian agricultural land.

Foreign investors are required to provide information on the location and size of the property, land use, market value and their percentage interest held.

The Government will compile the information gained from notifications received to develop the Agricultural Land Register (The Register). The Register is intended to be made publicly available from 2016.

In its announcement, the Government stated that The Register is intended to strengthen reporting requirements and provide a clear accessible picture of foreign ownership of agricultural land.

- DAN HORAN
Chair - Economic Development Group
Principal - Business Services
Moore Stephens Queensland (Burdekin)
Meet the farmer

Each edition of Farming in Focus will feature a producer from our region offering the reader an insight to what they do on their farm

Laurence Pavone, Managing Director, Sugarfix Consultancy Group

Where is your farm?
Colevale Road, Brandon.

How many different types of crops do you grow?
Three different types of crop being predominantly sugarcane, rice and bean crops.

When did you start farming?
I began working for my father in 1994 and began leasing the property off my father in the year 2002.

Is farming in your family?
Yes, I am a third generation farmer.

How did you come to have the farm you own and operate today?
My grandfather purchased the farm in 1960 and then my father purchased the neighbouring farm and began developing it into what it is today.

I began leasing the farm in the year 2002 and have continued the development.

How has growing up in the Burdekin influenced you?
Growing up on a farm and especially in the Burdekin has offered myself and many others a platform of stability, great work ethics and opportunity at an early age.

Farming has allowed me to be involved in not just growing cane and other products, but to also understand and develop grass roots business strategies for both my farm and other businesses and industries.

How and why did you diversify your crops?
Diversification within a farm is, and will be, a natural and essential evolution in this region as the cost of growing any product increases over time.

We have decided to expedite a farming program which integrates more than one crop per year on our farm, whilst utilising fallow areas more efficiently which should lead to better soil health and better returns. Both rice and beans offer vital benefits to our soil and crops like sugarcane.

Do you use efficient watering/fertiliser techniques?
Due to the heavy reliance on water in this region, our farming business has had no option but to change and develop better systems than we were using before. The over prescribed use of fertilisers in farming and the cost benefits of efficient techniques have been identified and this is now being well managed.

Exorbitant electricity prices have been the catalyst for myself and many other farmers to revisit our irrigation scheduling to achieve optimum efficiency where we can.

Many farmers in the Burdekin have outrivalled other areas when it comes to the uptake of new technology which assists us all in water and fertiliser efficiencies.
Council turns to community to help drive development

Burdekin Shire Council has taken to the community for help in driving economic development in the region.

Council has brought together 10 residents from across the Shire and established an Economic Development Strategic Advisory Group (EDSAG).

This group was created as a direct result of feedback from the Burdekin community who wants growth in jobs, wealth and population.

The group’s focus is on investment, employment and regional strategic opportunities. They meet regularly to share information and provide community members the chance to meet with government and industry representatives.

This group is a fantastic way to bring business and Council together in an effort to identify and attract new opportunities to diversify and strengthen our local economy.

Building a more robust local economy is paramount to keeping and attracting people to our shire. Anyone who has an idea or project that the group may be interested in can contact the group’s inaugural chairman Dan Horan on 0417 609 341. Dan is the Principal - Business Services at Moore Stephens Queensland (Burdekin).

Council this year adopted the Economic Development Strategy for 2015-2020 which was developed to take advantage of the emerging economic opportunities, explore new directions for the future and commit to creating a prosperous economy for the region.

To achieve the economic change required, we are focused on five key strategic themes:

- Enable Economic Infrastructure
- Attract Investment
- Strengthen Networks
- Encourage Innovation
- Empower Future Generations.

Ultimately, the success of the strategy will see improvements in liveability. A copy of the strategy can be found at www.burdekin.qld.gov.au

For more information on EDSAG or the Strategy please contact Council’s Economic Development Unit on 4783 9800.

Register to WIN a $100 voucher!

Register your email address to receive this newsletter electronically. Register before Friday, September 18, 2015, for your chance to win a $100 voucher to spend at a Burdekin business of your choice. Simply cut out and return the below registration form to Eliza Lovell, C/- Burdekin Shire Council, PO Box 974, Ayr  QLD  4807 or drop into the Council Chambers, 145 Young Street, Ayr.

Name: .................................................................

Email Address: .................................................................

☐ I agree to receive the Farming In Focus newsletter via my email.

Upcoming events

» August 29- September 5
  - Burdekin Art Society Annual Exhibition (Burdekin Theatre)

» September 5
  - Burdekin Water Festival
  Grand Parade & Mardi Gras (Queen Street, Ayr)

» September 6
  - Big Boys Toys (Ayr Uniting Church grounds)

» September 12
  - Giru Show (Giru School of Arts)

» September 19
  - Sydney Comedy Festival Showcase (Burdekin Theatre)

» October 11
  - Burdekin Relay for Life (Rugby Park Ayr)

» October 23
  - Burdekin Bride of the Year 2015 (Burdekin Memorial Hall)

» October 25
  - Jog for Jugs (Plantation Park)

» October 31
  - Lions Halloween Festival (Stardust Drive In, Ayr)

» November 1
  - Home Hill Harvest Festival
  Sibson Accounting Golf Ambrose (Home Hill Golf Club)
  - Home Hill Harvest Festival
  Guardian Pharmacy Fun Run (Home Hill Golf Club)

» November 6
  - Home Hill Harvest Festival
  Rotary Ball (Burdekin Memorial Hall)

» November 7
  - Home Hill Harvest Festival
  Sunwater Grand Parade and Ergon Energy Mardi Gras (Home Hill)
The Queensland Government has recently announced their commitment to implement the Lower Burdekin Catchment Development Project.

The project has been developed in response to the growing demand to access water from the Burdekin Falls Dam and associated water distribution systems for the purpose of enabling appropriate and sustainable economic development and growth.

The aim of the project is to provide the Government with a clear understanding of the future development potential of the lower Burdekin and to identify how the existing water infrastructure and water resources can be better used.

The project area includes water (surface and groundwater) associated with the Burdekin Falls Dam, Burdekin Haughton Water Supply Scheme and Lower Burdekin Water.

Existing water allocations will remain unchanged as the focus is on identifying opportunities to make better use of water resources by increasing water allocation holder participation in the water market. The project will include demand from all sectors including agriculture, industry and urban.

It is important to note that implementation of any options identified in the study will be subject to government consideration and identification of a funding source. Balancing environmental considerations with economic growth are a high priority.

The project is being funded by the Department of State Development and managed by the North Queensland Regional office. The project will be delivered through a seven-part program of work and is expected to be completed in February 2016.

For more information go to www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/lowerburdekin, email lowerburdekinenquiries@dsd.qld.gov.au or contact the Department of State Development on 07 4758 3430.

Shire backs fluming recycling

Council is supporting a fluming recycling trial in an effort to keep the plastic out of the Shire’s landfill.

Local firm Amdett Services and Plastic Recycling has offered to collect fluming waste of two or more tonnes from Burdekin farmers. Amdett suggests putting the old fluming into used one tonne fertiliser bags for ease of storage and collection.

The collected waste will then be sent to a recycling company who will recycle the plastic waste into reusable plastic resins and sheets.

Producers or farmers can contact Amdett on 0407 690 698.

Council is urging producers to support the trial as it is estimated that 100 kilometres of fluming is sold to our farmers each year.

If you can prevent this sort of waste being dumped in Council’s landfill, or from being burnt, then it’s of benefit to everyone.

The Council is continually investigating further opportunities to work with Burdekin farmers and growers on the project.

Apply for drought help

Burdekin primary producers who are struggling with drought conditions can apply for assistance even though the Shire has not been drought declared.

Producers who are experiencing their driest 10-15 years are encouraged to apply for an Individually Droughted Property (IDP) declaration.

This will set in motion a governmental process where they may be able to access the same assistance received by impacted producers within a drought-declared area.

Producers will have to demonstrate some drought management, such as destocking, to access the scheme.

There is a list of criteria you must meet before you will be eligible to be considered for IDP declaration and producers will have to show some self-reliance in drought management.

Council has passed on all relevant information to canegrower groups.

For more information go to https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industry/agriculture/rural-disaster-recovery/drought-assistance/idp-declaration
Collaborative approach to restore wetlands

Healthy wetlands are important to the Lower Burdekin and the Great Barrier Reef as they provide a delivery network for agriculture irrigation, flood mitigation, habitat for juvenile fish species such as barramundi and migratory birds, and replenishment of groundwater.

The health of the wetlands is currently under threat from changes in hydrology that supports the infestation of aquatic weeds. To combat these changes a collaborative approach is being taken by NQ Dry Tropics (NQDT), Lower Burdekin Water (LBW) and Burdekin Shire Council to strategically restore ecological function to the priority wetlands and waterways within the 'Lower Burdekin Water' operational areas.

The NQDT Systems Repair Project is improving aquatic weed management, improving fish passage, planting creek bank vegetation on landholders’ properties for fish and bird habitat and upgrading irrigation delivery gates.

By installing automated gates, LBW is more efficiently delivering irrigation water directly to its customers in a shorter period of time. The gates also help reduce losses of excess water leaving the delivery areas which create weed chokes in the shallow coastal wetlands in between the cropping areas and saltwater estuaries.

Water flows are being reduced to priority wetlands to help mimic a more natural wetting and drying cycle. This management action controls weeds naturally by seasonally drying them out without the use of herbicides or mechanical control.

Weed chokes in the Burdekin wetlands and waterways also provide perfect habitat for feral pigs and coot populations to proliferate.

The aquatic weeds in the deeper upstream wetlands are being chemically controlled by Council. This control is funded by a cost share agreement between 96 local landholders, Council, LBW and NQDT under Riparian Management Agreements.

To improve this practice, NQDT is exploring how to harvest and compost these weeds to improve agricultural soil. For more information, contact Scott Fry on email scott.fry@nqdrytropics.com.au or call 07 4722 5732.