

Project Catalyst

Grower story

Daniel and Leanne Corder –
Mixing it up for improved outcomes



Mill region:

Herbert **Property**

size: 56ha **Years**

farming: 2

Area under cane: 54ha

Member since: 2016

Extended fallow: 18 months

Biological inputs: various
liquid fertilisers

Mixed species cover crops in
extended fallow, used as pasture
for meat chickens

Daniel and Leanne Corder had
been dreaming about farming life
for many years, whilst they lived in
Melbourne. When Leanne became
ill, moving to the tropical north of
Queensland was a suggestion from
a specialist, who'd witnessed
dramatic health benefits to others
suffering the same condition. A
holiday in Townsville quickly
proved
beneficial and they made the decision
to uproot their city life in pursuit of a
better future. Cane farming wasn't part
of their plan, however it has proven to
be exactly what they needed to achieve
their goals.

140 acres is considered a small
sugarcane property and with global
prices fluctuating, their decision to
pursue the
dream of chicken farming, has
ensured a sustainable income over
the past few years. It hasn't been
without challenges, drought, flood
and humidity have all
shaped the development of their
business. Daniel recalls the moment,
"Once we had children, we became
much more interested in what they were
eating. Good quality chicken, in
particular was difficult to source."
Leanne said they accepted the fact their
chicken farm had cane growing on it,
"We figured, now that we've got the
cane, we might stick with it a little while
and see if



Daniel raises meat chickens in addition to growing cane

we can do them both at the same time."

With no farming background the
knowledge gap was a huge challenge
to overcome, Leanne says a lot of it
was looking at what other producers
were doing around the country.
"There's a producer in WA who's got
their own on- farm abattoir so Dan
went over there for a couple of weeks
to learn what they're doing and how."

Daniel may have underestimated
growing cane too, "Whilst cane is just
a grass essentially, it still takes a fair
bit in terms

of the timing and your farming
systems to grow the best cane. Then
getting the knowledge around a
breeding flock, multiple genetic
lines, food safety
regulations, transportation regulations,
designing, building and then operating
our own abattoir, we've been fighting a
lot of uphill battles, but we're getting
through them."

Daniel and Leanne credit the
diversification of their business and the
incorporated management of integrated
farming systems, for their success to
date.

What it's about

Project Catalyst is a grower-led innovation project in sugar cane that was formed to explore and validate farm management practice change leading to improved water quality for the Great Barrier Reef.

This year (2018) they won the Queensland category for the 'Delicious Produce Awards' in the first 12 months of operation.

"We're certainly very proud of what we've achieved and what we can do in the future as we learn more. Sugar prices have been quite bad in the last 12 months, because we have the chickens, we're more sustainable."

Their soil under cane is also reaping the benefits of holistic farm management, with trials including multi-species cover crops (pasture for chickens), in extended fallow (18 months, not 6) and several biological liquid fertilisers they make on farm, from waste streams. Daniel is excited to be part of Project Catalyst. "Along with a couple of other Project Catalyst growers we invested in some capital equipment to help make these inputs a lot easier, so we're sharing knowledge and capital with other growers, to minimise our expenditure on inputs and also incorporating a lot more biological inputs on farm."

Project Catalyst has exposed Daniel and Leanne to trialed innovations they've adopted across farm too, "We are doing a lot of other practices that Catalyst growers have introduced us to as well, going to controlled traffic, wider rows, but we get a lot of farmers coming out to see what we're doing. They're really interested in our cover crop, the ten or twelve different species we're planting and our extended fallow, as well as having animals in the system."

The future certainly looks promising as they implement what Daniel describes as a "more natural system", utilising vegetation for animals to feed on, which in turn fertilise and turn the soil. "We're hoping to not use any synthetic fertiliser during the first crop cycle, where we plant our cane back on the fallow. If it hadn't been for the floods in March and no rain since, we'd have our first lot of cane in where we've had chickens."

With the scientific quantification of the trials, the opportunity to demonstrate improved outcomes to other farmers is driving Daniel to continue thinking of

Transylvanian Naked Neck chicken - a more suitable breed for the North Queensland tropical heat and a big part of the genetics program that Dan and Leanne are utilising



The Cordners use Maremma dogs to guard their chickens out in the paddocks

ways to innovate on farm, not just for him but for his children to inherit an improved property.

"In terms of minimising your

environmental impacts and improving your returns for your farm, we did a fair bit of research and Project Catalyst was one of the things we came across and were attracted to straight away. It's just the whole sharing nature of farmers in Catalyst and farmers really pushing the boundaries to improve multiple things."

"We want to leave something better behind, so that our children have got a better farm to continue on with."

Daniel and Leanne Cordner

