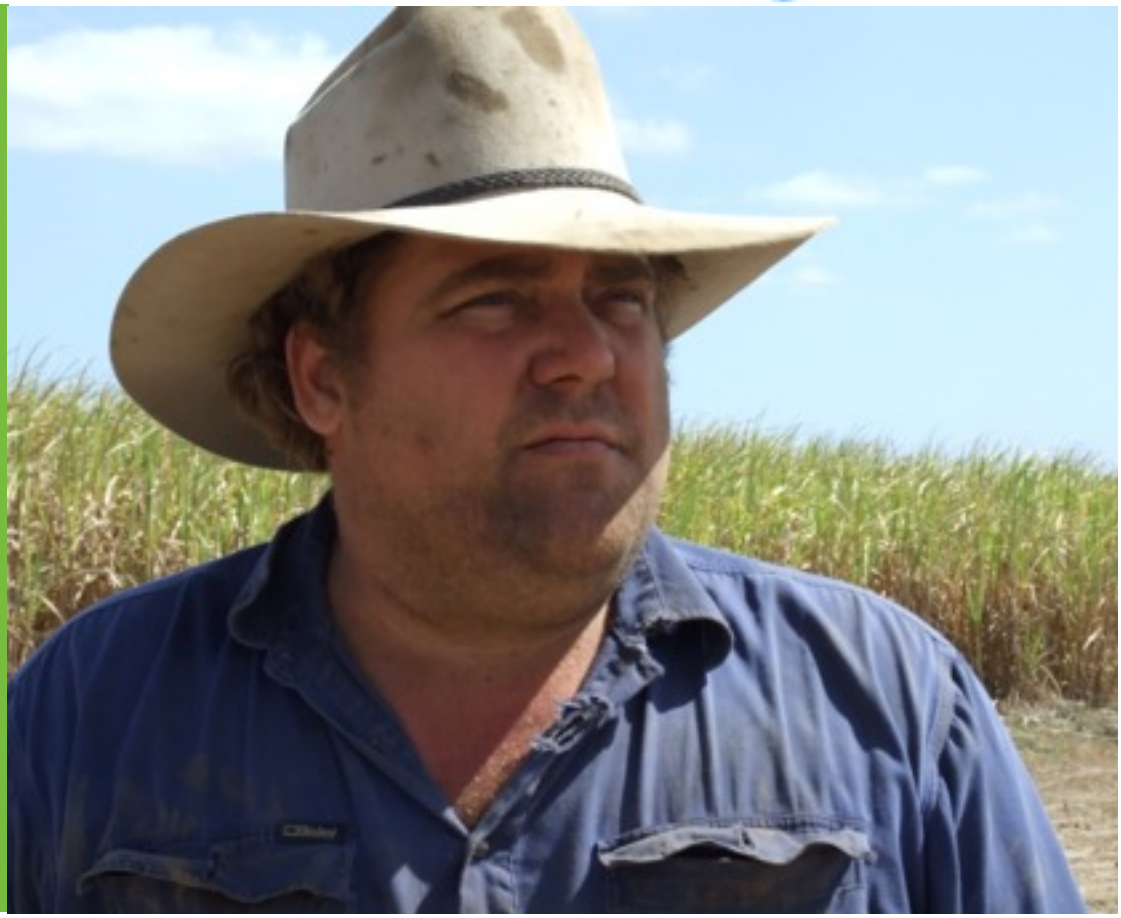
CASESTUDY

BILL BLAIR

2011



Bill Blair lives south of Proserpine, Queensland, Australia

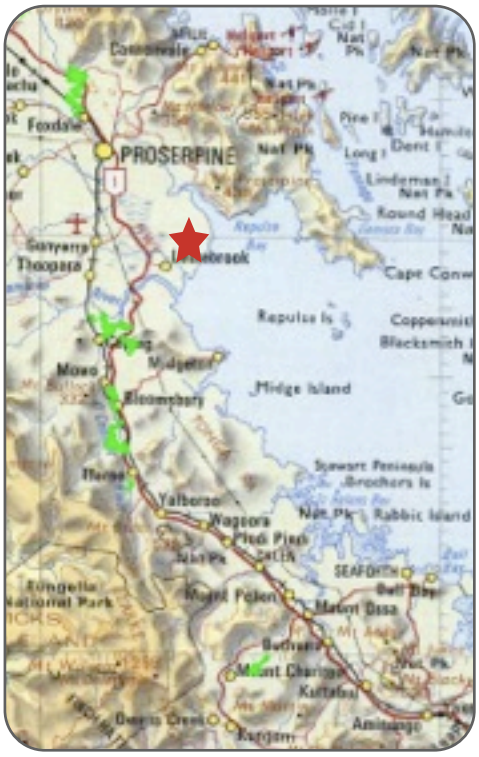
Bill & Shiralee Blair

Bio

A third generation sugar grower in the Proserpine area, Bill has been at the forefront of trialling new farming practices since 2000 and is recognised as one of the local industry leaders in giving new ideas a go.

Bill has been growing alternate crops for over 10 years and has continually been modifying his machinery to incorporate these crops into his sugar and cattle enterprises. The alternate crops he has grown has included soybean, mungbean, navybean and sorghum. These crops have had varying levels of success but he is always learning and modifying his farming practices from the lessons learnt.

Bill's farms are currently being converted into a 1.8 metre controlled traffic system and from 2010 this will be under GPS guidance with the establishment of a community base station on his home farm. This will allow other growers in this local area to implement GPS based activities at a reduced cost. The change over to GPS has been quite seamless with no real problems incurred.



Trial: Planting soybean out of season precision agriculture

Description:

To help improve his ability to grow a good legume crop every year on his fallow, Bill was keen to trial growing a soybean crop through the early autumn to summer period to be harvested as a seed crop for the soybean he would plant into his beds in early summer.

Through good crop management, the aim is to maximise the genetic potential of the seed crop he has grown to then improve the germination and productivity of his main soybean crop that will be harvested and sold.

Issue being addressed:

Can he grow his own seed (and is there suitable varieties) that is cheaper and more effective than buying seed that needs to be transported?

Harvesting blocks early that will be fallowed. This means that cultivation operations will happen in late winter at a time of low rain fall and the ground will have nearly 12 months break from a cane crop. Does the longer fallow period and using legumes help the next plant cane crop?

Solutions being tested:

Bill planted the variety leichart, which has an indeterminate growth pattern and we were hopeful it would handle the lack of sunlight hours coming out of winter. Crop established successfully with a plant population of 275,000 plants to the hectare, so it is achievable planting at this time of season to get a crop up.
Crop suffered damage during the growth phase caused by slightly saline irrigation water through low pressure overhead equipment. This did not allow us to take the crop through to harvest.

Immediate results:

The same trial was supposed to happen in 2010 but inclement weather conditions severely impacted on the establishment of any soybean crop it is hoped to establish this trial again in 2011 .

This trial has shown us that it is possible to grow a seed soybean crop for future crops grown in the wet tropical region of Queensland, but to achieve a sustainable solution for other growers we must get a crop to harvest stage and then plant the subsequent crop and monitor results all of the way.

Agriculture in the wet tropics will always be difficult, but with growers like Bill Blair it is possible to take a poor result and analyse it to achieve a practical solution with slightly modified tools over time.

"Project Catalyst has provided me with the support I need to get real outcomes. As more growers start to realise the way we're doing things is on the right track the uptake will increase." Bill Blair