



Cane farmers on the cutting edge

Farmers and the Great Barrier Reef might seem to have little in common – but for 70 cane producers along Queensland's coast, taking care of one of Australia's most iconic natural assets has become a top priority.

This month cane growers will join leading experts in innovation and sustainability for the Project Catalyst Growers Forum 2014 to discuss a future for sugarcane production that continues to significantly reduce the environmental impact of agriculture on the Great Barrier Reef.

The event is set to attract more than 120 participants, including farmers from Mackay and the Whitsundays, the Wet Tropics and across the Burdekin, as well as leading global and Australian researchers, industry partners, economists and sustainability experts.

The forum will be held on Hamilton Island from February 24 – 26 following a farm tour in the Proserpine region.

Project Catalyst farmer Lou Raiteri will be hosting the 2014 farm tour on his property, north of Proserpine.

Mr Raiteri said the Project Catalyst fitted in with what growers were trying to do.

"I was one of the first 20 growers involved in Project Catalyst right from its inception," Mr Raiteri said.

"To me, it just fits in with what we're trying to do, to improve our sustainability and productivity and be more conscious

of the environment.

Mr Raiteri is a third generation grower. His family has been on the same property for over 85 years and his son is next in line to take care of the farm.

"This land is still taking care of us after all that time and I think it is our responsibility to look after what we have," Mr Raiteri said.

"What Project Catalyst does is bring together likeminded growers with enthusiasm who are all ready to try something new.

"It gives us the support we need to step out and raise the bar and challenge ourselves – we can look up and say 'ok, there's the benchmark' and we find new ways to reach it.

"It's absolutely remarkable what comes out of it."

Now in its milestone 5th year, Project Catalyst is a pioneering partnership between cane farmers, Natural Resource Management Groups (Reef Catchments, Terrain Natural Resource Management and NQ Dry Tropics), the Coca Cola Foundation, WWF and the Australian Government. The forum is being coordinated locally in Mackay and the Whitsundays by Reef Catchments.

The three-day event will link those involved in regional sugar production with leading global innovators.

Sugar producers will have the opportunity to hear from keynote guests including Dave McLaughlin -

WWF Vice President of Agriculture (United States) and Dr David Cropley - University of South Australia Associate Professor (Engineering Innovation) and scientific consultant for the ABC TV Documentary, *Redesign My Brain*.

Reef Catchments CEO Robert Cocco said Project Catalyst recognised the significant efforts of sugar producers who were taking responsibility for their own environmental footprint.

"This major event celebrates the work of forward-thinking Australian cane farmers who are at the fore of truly innovative practice that also protects our region's natural assets, including the iconic Great Barrier Reef," Mr Cocco said.

"The actions to date of the farmers involved in Project Catalyst have directly improved water quality to the Great Barrier Reef, while also helping increase farm productivity and profitability.

"These farmers are leading the way in the adoption of cutting-edge farm management that promotes better business and a better environment – essentially, learning to do more with less.

"We are proud to be involved in this unique partnership that connects our sugar producers with a leading think-tank of organisations nationally and globally to break new ground in sustainable agriculture."




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GREENER FUTURE: Project Catalyst farmers at last year's field day.