

## Stephen Accornero

Profitability of corn as a rotation crop

REGION: Wet Tropics | Foresthome

Stephen Accornero farms 485 hectares of cane land in three areas around Ingham; at Foresthome, Abergowrie and Bambaroo.

It's a family business for Stephen, with his father growing cane in the Ingham region before him and Stephen's son Brenden now working alongside him. Stephen also employs one full timer to work across these three properties.

Previously, Stephen fallowed his land from cane for 18 months growing instead, a crop of corn which ended up turning a profit.

Growing corn as a rotation to his sugarcane is the basis of Steven's project for Project Catalyst.

Stephen has also improved his farming practice through the federal government's Reef Programme (formerly Reef Rescue).

### Issues being addressed

Not only was Stephen's corn crop turning a profit but Stephen believes he was also getting an improvement in his cane yield after growing the corn. However, this perception was by observation only, as Stephen never actually properly measured the gain in cane yield.

The questions Stephen wanted to answer were - was the gain he believes he observed because of the corn or because of the 18 month without cane? Furthermore, was growing corn economically beneficial or would he have been better off just growing cane?

### Issues being addressed

Stephen has set up his trial on a block that was fallowed in November 2011. On this 3.3 hectare block, in May 2012, Stephen planted three strips of corn and left three strips fallow. Corn was harvested in late 2012 & cane planted across the block in 2013.

In 2014 cane was harvested from each strip to supply data for an initial economic analysis which has not yet been completed. Cane yield from this trial will be measured for a full crop cycle.

Although Stephen has some early data, he will not have complete results for a full crop cycle.

Stephen Accornero is trialling corn as a rotation crop in sugarcane - as well as his corn crop turning a profit, Stephen believes he has observed an improvement in his cane yield.

Below: Stephen's trial site for Project Catalyst.



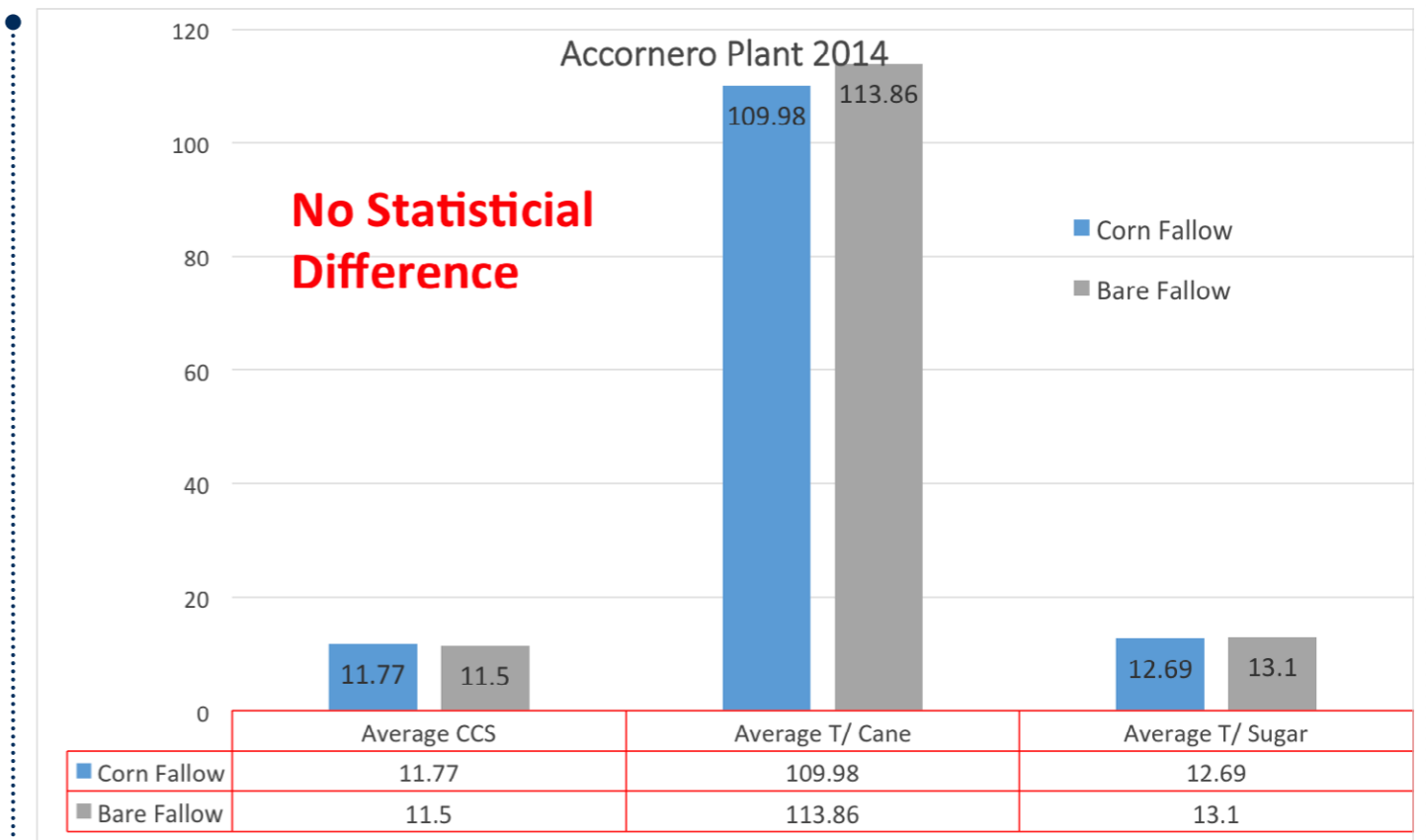
Below: Stephen's corn trial, ready to harvest at his property at Abergowrie.



Right: Stephen and his son Brenden on their property at Foresthome.



Below: Accornero Plant Cane Harvest Results - Graph





# PROVIDING EXPERT ECONOMIC AND AGRONOMIC EXTENSION SUPPORT TO PROJECT CATALYST.



## Megan Star, Queensland Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Ph: (07) 4923 6225  
E: megan.star@daff.qld.gov.au

## Life's a trade-off Economic Support to Project Catalyst

To ensure sustainability of individual growers and the sugar industry, long term profitability and economic viability is critical. Completing an economic analysis allows growers to understand if their Project Catalyst innovation or technology improves their profitability, business resilience and management.

Economics allows us to assess the different trade-offs of decisions we make regarding adoption of new management practices, altering equipment or new technology. To quantify these trade-offs we want to understand

- How it will affect the production system?
- What will change and by how much?
- What is the cost of the capital required to make the change?
- Where in the block will we see these changes?

We then like to use dollar values to quantify the trade-off and how it will impact your wallet at the end of the day.

We also know that innovation and industry adoption is not a straight line process and there are sometimes a few things to sort out along the way or modify further. It is also important to consider how

technologies or innovations impact production over the whole crop cycle.

We have looked at what the community values improvements in water quality from the hard work and management changes being made by Catalyst growers. This is about assessing their trade-offs and quantifying them in dollar terms too. The community has a vested interest in supporting the work of growers to make sure they can use the reef and so can future generations.

### Growers comments

*"If we get to the stage where everyone is happy the environmentalists, and we're happy and profitable then that is the main aim...and we can keep farming forever then"* - Gerry Deguara

*"This is very exciting, I can't wait to see how it progresses..."*  
- Tony Jeppesen

*"We have no desire to push practices that send people broke, the trick is how do we do it in a way that is economic? Sustainable? And good for everyone?"*

### Right:

Helen and John Pastega, Project Catalyst Growers (Mackay Whitsunday region)



### Left:

Natalie Fiocco (Farmacist) and Project Catalyst grower, Gerry Deguara.



Farmacist has been involved in numerous Project Catalyst activities that have achieved valuable outcomes for the industry, both economically and environmentally. Many of these activities have been the springboard to the widespread adoption of innovative new farming techniques into the wider industry growing community. The direct outcomes of this adoption have seen a significant reduction of environmentally sensitive herbicide and fertilizer inputs which has led to improved water quality benefits. However, far greater legacy of the project has been a greater appreciation of the impact that some farming practices have on the environment, particularly the Great Barrier Reef. The project has been an invaluable learning experience for all involved but there is also an appreciation that with support from the project more can be achieved.

## John Markley Project Manager Farmacist

M: 0408 185 083  
E: johnm@farmacist.com.au

## Farmacist Agronomic Support to Project Catalyst

Farmacist is an agricultural consulting company that specialises in developing and extending innovation to our agricultural clients. We have been involved with Project Catalyst since its inception providing agronomic support and data to the participating growers. Our business seeks to encourage and foster knowledge sharing between our dedicated staff and the many innovative and likeminded growers that contribute to the success of Project Catalyst. As Project Catalyst expanded into the other regions, Farmacist has been proud to expand our role to work with the innovative sugar industry growers from the Wet Tropics through to the Burdekin and the Central cane growing regions.

For the sugarcane industry to remain viable, innovation in production techniques to improve yield, reduce costs and improve environmental sustainability is essential. Project Catalyst has helped deliver valuable investment into a program that not only provides R&D but has also fostered and encouraged growers to help bring their ideas and skills to develop innovative practices.



# Suncorp Bank

As Australia's leading regional bank, Suncorp Bank has been supporting regional and rural communities since it commenced operations as the Queensland Agriculture Bank in 1902.

Today, with more than 110 years experience and a part of the top 15 ASX listed Suncorp Group, Suncorp Bank is well positioned to continue its support of regional communities and agribusinesses across the country.

Suncorp Bank is proud to be part of this year's Project Catalyst and be aligned with a group of forward thinking farmers committed to preserving the future of the sugar industry.

Suncorp Bank Regional Manager for North Queensland, Troy Constance, said Suncorp Bank has a long history of working with sugar producers and our team remain 100 per cent committed to the industry.

"As Australia's leading regional bank, Suncorp Bank is proud to support initiatives that contribute long-lasting benefits to regional and rural communities," Mr Constance said.

"Ensuring the needs of our customers are achieved is important to us and Project Catalyst is the perfect platform to discuss how we can support innovative farming practices now, and into the future."

Suncorp Bank is proud of the role it plays as a major provider of business services in the agriculture sector, and is committed to helping its clients build their wealth and leave a legacy for the future.

Suncorp Bank's local agribusiness specialists are dedicated to understanding the needs of their customers. They understand the critical role a bank plays in supporting regional communities and they are committed to building in-depth relationships with customers to support them on their journey.

To find out more about how Suncorp Bank can help your business, visit [www.suncorpbank.com.au/agribusiness](http://www.suncorpbank.com.au/agribusiness) or call your local banking specialist

**Suncorp Bank  
Ayr Branch**  
David Harding  
☎ 0407 579 831

**Suncorp Bank  
Mackay Branch**  
Stuart Mitchell  
☎ 07 4969 1564

**Suncorp Bank  
Ingham Branch**  
Rob Mitchell  
☎ 0408 451 412



Suncorp-Metway Ltd ABN 66 010 831 722  
27945 12/02/15 A