

REEF RESCUE

2010

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Tony Soden

WET SEASON COVER CROP

Reef Rescue helped Tony Soden to implement a cover crop in his fallow to maintain ground cover during the wet season. The funding will also assist Tony in putting organic matter back into his soil and out-compete weed species during production of his eggplant, pumpkin and melon crops.

Out of the 200 hectares used for horticulture crop production on Tony Soden's Longford Creek property, half is spelled and the other half is planted up, so that around 100 hectares is utilised each year.

From this, around 80 hectares produces eggplant and the other 20 is used for pumpkins or melons to provide crop rotation throughout the farm.

Tony was successful in receiving Reef Rescue funding to help him implement a cover crop in his fallow to maintain ground cover during the wet season, put organic matter back into the soil and to out-compete weed species so they don't seed and generate during crop production.

After the 100 hectares has been spelled for 12 months, he does some ground preparation so that he

can plant a cover crop, such as sorghum, during the wet season from December to April.

The cover crop is then incorporated and the ground bedded-up, ready for planting eggplant (5ft 4" rows) or pumpkins and melons (10ft 8" rows).

Plastic is placed on top of the beds, with trickle tape beneath it.

Tony says that he also has three filtration and fertigation units, so that 100 per cent of the farm is covered.

"We plant with a set-planting fertiliser mix and then utilise our fertigation system to apply the right amount of nutrients at the right time, based on crop stage and any nutrient deficiencies. The aim is for a maximum of three to four fertigation applications during a crop cycle."



About the farm...

Tony Soden is a second generation farmer who owns and manages a property at Longford Creek, 40km north of Proserpine. His family bought the property in 1978. Half of the 400 hectares is used for cattle, while Tony grows eggplant, pumpkin and melon on the other. Eden Lassie Creek and other small creeks flow through the property, providing water for stock and irrigation purposes by transferring to on-farm storages during the summer wet season.



Despite the plastic providing weed control amongst the crop, there are still issues of weeds in the inter-row.

Depending on rainfall, Tony needs to do maybe a maximum of two knockdown chemical applications during a crop cycle to control the weeds.

The eggplants are then handpicked and brought back to the packing shed before being placed in cold storage ready to be trucked away.

Tony aims to establish 10,000 eggplants per hectare and half a case per plant - that's 5000 cases per hectare.

During the busiest time of the season, Tony employs a number of pickers and packers to help get his entire crop off the paddock.

He has been making great changes on his farm to maximise

production, while minimising impacts to natural resource condition, such as water quality, leaving his farm.

Reef Rescue has helped Tony to implement his cover crop during the wet season, when economic reasons meant that it may not have been able to be done each year.

For water quality, the benefits from the work that Tony is doing through Reef Rescue includes reducing the risk of sediment and particulate nutrient losses by using a cover crop to maintain good ground cover during the wet season.

Tony is also reducing risk from dissolved chemical losses with reduced herbicide usage during the crop stage.



OUTCOMES



Maximising production while minimising impact on natural resource condition



Putting organic matter back into the soil



Out-competing weed species and reducing weed pressure



Reducing risk of sediment and particulate nutrient loss by maintaining good ground cover