

Prevention the best cure: RSD threatening commercial sugarcane crops

More ratoon stunting disease (RSD) is being found in commercial sugarcane crops and in nursery cane in 2018 than in previous years, which is raising concern among industry staff about the impact that this disease is having on the industry, according to Sugar Research Australia (SRA).

The disease causes significant economic losses but has no external symptoms. Because it is spread through diseased planting material and on machinery, this means that growers and contractors are reminded to maintain their vigilance against RSD with planting and harvesting in full swing in many areas.

RSD is one of Australia's major sugarcane diseases and continues to cost the industry through lost production.

SRA Key Focus Area Leader for Biosecurity, Dr Andrew Ward, said that SRA's RSD diagnostic lab is detecting more RSD in samples in 2018 than in previous years, including in cane that was to be used as planting material. He urges growers to arrange with their local productivity service organisation to have their planting material tested for RSD.

"Planting represents a significant expense for growers and disease-free planting material lays the foundation for high yielding crops," Dr Ward said.

"Harvest is also a high-risk time for RSD to hitch a ride on machinery, spreading the disease between blocks, farms, and even districts.

"However, good farm hygiene can greatly reduce the risk. Cane knives, harvesters, plant cutters, planters and stool splitters should all be routinely sterilised between blocks on the same farm and between farms.

"Dirty machinery is risky machinery. If RSD infects a crop, yields will decrease and it can be a long and difficult process to reduce its impact. It is far easier to avoid the problem in the first place."

Dr Ward added that recent improvements in the RSD test has revealed that the disease is more widespread in the industry than previously thought.

"This reinforces the need for stringent hygiene, as well as ensuring that planting material is being sourced from a clean source. Growers need to maintain close contact with their local productivity services organisation for sourcing RSD-free planting material.

"There is also information on variety response to RSD in the online variety support tool QCANESelect, available via the SRA website. Although some varieties respond differently to the disease, growers are

urged to note that no variety can be considered immune and the key planks of prevention are around clean planting material and good farm hygiene.”

A range of resources are available on the SRA website regarding RSD, including an extension booklet with more information on equipment sterilisation and developing a clean seed management plan. Visit <https://sugarresearch.com.au/growers-and-millers/pests-and-diseases/>.

Media contact:



Brad Pfeffer | Executive Manager Communications

Tel 07 3331 3340 | Mob 0419 175 815

Email bpfeffer@sugarresearch.com.au | Web sugarresearch.com.au | ABN 16 163 670 068

PO Box 86 | 50 Meiers Road | Indooroopilly Q 4068 Australia