

Question on Notice

No. 477

Asked on 2 April 2019

MR N DAMETTO ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise what he and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries are doing to ensure the Queensland sugar industry's economic sustainability?

ANSWER:

Sugarcane is a significant crop and an important contributor to the Queensland economy. In order for the industry to remain economically viable, it is important for it to continue to increase productivity; to diversify into new products and markets; and to continue to improve its environmental sustainability to meet the changing expectations of key customers. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) recognises this and is working to support the ongoing economic viability of the sector.

DAF and the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority work closely together to assist Queensland's cane growers in times of natural disaster. During the recent monsoonal trough event in north Queensland, impacted primary producers, including cane growers in the Hinchinbrook Shire, were able to access funding of up to \$5 000 for freight assistance; low interest loans; and recovery grants of up to \$75 000.

Undertakings in relation to productivity and profitability are predominantly delivered through DAF's Coastal Farming Systems team and agricultural economists; and through research funding to Sugar Research Australia (SRA), the sugar industry's leading research body.

The Coastal Farming Systems team develops, implements and delivers activities that help the sugarcane industry address issues such as nutrient management, soil health, paddock variability, and variety selection. The team is also researching the use of technology such as satellite imagery, electrical conductivity mapping, and drone imagery to help producers better manage their businesses effectively and efficiently.

DAF's agricultural economists are actively working with the sugarcane industry to support the adoption of profitable and sustainable management practices.

One example of this is the Harvesting Best Management Practice (BMP) project which is being undertaken in collaboration with SRA. Harvesting BMP is aimed at optimising harvesting practices and reducing harvester sugarcane losses in the paddock. Results to date indicate that using best practice can increase yield by 5.5 per cent. In collaboration with SRA, the team is working with harvesting operators and communicating findings to the wider industry to inform decision-making. It is estimated that full adoption by industry could provide an economic benefit of up to \$40 million per year.

In addition to DAF's collaborative work with SRA, it also funds the organisation directly. Since 2015, DAF has invested \$16.75 million into sugarcane research, development and

extension through the SRA grant process. For the 2018-19 financial year, this investment is \$2.85 million.