New research to deliver outcomes for Australian sugarcane growers and millers

Sugar Research Australia (SRA) has announced the investment in seven new research projects that will drive productivity, profitability, and sustainability for Australian sugarcane growers and millers.

These new projects add to the extensive portfolio of SRA's research investment that spans across the priorities identified in SRA's five-year Strategic Plan.

SRA CEO Mr Neil Fisher said the research was identified as part of the SRA Board's approach to targeted investment in 2019/20.

"These investments focus on transformational research, variety development and milling efficiency and technology. We are ensuring that our new investment addresses critical research gaps and requirements within our Strategic Plan," Mr Fisher said.

"All of these projects have been chosen as part of a rigorous selection process over the last six months, overseen by the SRA Research Funding Panel (RFP).

"They have been assessed based on the results they will provide to the industry, leading to positive outcomes for our members and investors."

New investment includes innovative research that will understand how the industry can use emerging technology to help diagnose the prevalence of ratoon stunting disease (RSD) by scanning cane as it makes its way through sugar mills.

This research has the potential to link the volumes of cane passing through the factory back to the paddock, in a way that would greatly enhance the industry's ability to diagnose and manage RSD.

"Like any potentially transformational research, there is no guarantee of success," Mr Fisher said.

"But these game-changing innovations are exactly the type of investment the industry requires as it deals with the challenges of the weather and a depressed world sugar price.

"SRA is also investing in several projects that continue to deliver on our commitment to enhancing the SRA sugarcane breeding program and reach our target of achieving 2 percent annual genetic gain.

"This includes the application of cutting-edge technology such as unmanned aerial vehicles to collect data that improves the way we deliver new varieties to the industry. Other research will investigate the use of near infra-red technology to assess the fibre characteristics of sugarcane varieties, and also explore the use of machine vision sensors to directly measure losses during harvesting.

"In the milling research space, we are also investing in research to eliminate the arcing of mill rollers and improve crushing performance, as well as the development of new training modules for sugar factory operators."

The portfolio of SRA's research investment is available via the SRA website: https://sugarresearch.com.au/research-portfolio/

SRA's investment is funded by the statutory levy of 70 cents per tonne of cane, to which growers and millers each contribute 35c per tonne of cane each. This investment in research is supported by a co-contribution of about $6.6M from the Federal Government and $2.85 million from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF).

New 2019/20 research investment:

Validating high-throughput phenomics technologies for sugarcane clonal selection	**SRA**
NIR Calibrations for Fibre Quality	**SRA**
Strategies to minimise impacts of processing existing soft cane varieties, and industry cost/benefit analysis	**QUT**
RSD detection at the sugar factory – disease detection blueprint	**SRA**
Harvester losses assessment by real-time Machine Vision Systems	**USQ**
Australian Sugar Industry Training - Development of factory training modules - Phase 2	**QUT**
Eliminating roll arcing	**QUT**