

THE EFFECT OF DELAYED SUGARCANE PLANTING DUE TO FALLOW CROPPING IN THE BURDEKIN

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THE BURDEKIN region has great potential for growing fallow crops within the sugarcane cropping cycle. Taking fallow crops through to final harvest affects when sugarcane is planted. Sugarcane planted in March/April in the Burdekin region usually results in large plant-crop yields. However, harvesting a mung-bean, soybean or cotton crop would occur in mid-April, mid-May and late-July for each crop, respectively.

The loss of time in relation to a March/April planting may affect yield. A time of planting experiment was established to determine the extent to which sugarcane yield is affected by the extended break period required for growing fallow crops.

Sugarcane was planted in April, August and October 2012 into two fallow systems, bare and ebony cowpea. Sugarcane was also established in a plough-out replant (PORP) treatment in August.

Yields for April, August and October planting times were 133, 106 and 91 t/ha, respectively. Yield following an ebony cowpea fallow was significantly lower than the bare fallow, 107 and 113 t/ha respectively.

Yield of sugarcane planted in August was higher in fallowed plots (106 t/ha) than PORP (91 t/ha). Although a loss in sugarcane yield due to planting time was found in this experiment, data from the ratoon crops and further work on the economics of the systems are required.

The harvested grain from a fallow crop would contribute to a grower's profitability. However, the impact on the harvesting and milling sectors should also be considered.

Reasons for reduced yields following ebony cowpea are discussed. Management of crop residues in these cropping systems will be an important factor in their overall success and requires further research investment.

Low yields in the PORP system show the benefit of a break period and confirm the results of previous studies.