



MEDIA RELEASE

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Coca-Cola supports local farmers

A global soft drink manufacturer and an environment group are getting behind north Queensland sugar cane farmers.

Project Catalyst supports farmers who are developing practices that improve the quality of water leaving farms.

Project Catalyst was born in the Mackay Whitsundays area and is expanding to the Burdekin region in north Queensland.

The initiative is supported by the Coca-Cola Foundation, World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and Mackay Whitsunday natural resource management group Reef Catchments.

It's expanding into north Queensland with the support of local natural resource management group NQ Dry Tropics.

NQ Dry Tropics CEO Scott Crawford said the initiative has already seen changes in the Mackay area.

He says, "In the first year of Project Catalyst it improved soil, nutrient, pesticide, irrigation and storm water management on almost 5,000 hectares of farms.

"It's greatly reduced pollutants running off farms and into nearby waterways."

Ten farmers in Ayr and Home Hill are participating in Project Catalyst's expansion into north Queensland.

The Project supports growers by providing them with agronomic and economic support for practices like controlled traffic, irrigation efficiency and fertiliser management.

Farmer Rob Ahern has been reducing inorganic fertiliser inputs in favour of using mill mud and agricultural bacteria. "I'm involved in Project Catalyst because it gives me the chance to talk to other farmers here and in other districts.

"I like to try to get other farmers to see alternative ways of growing cane than what they're traditionally used to. I'm a big believer of showing people what I do and what a difference it can make and in helping farmers to reduce their production costs." Rob says.

Scott Crawford says, "Project Catalyst is about supporting innovative growers and disseminating what they're learnt to the sugar cane industry in Australia and overseas."

Working together to improve land and water

Dermot O’Gorman, WWF Australia CEO says, “The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest living organism and is currently facing two key threats to its long term survival: climate change and land-based pollution.

“The initial phase of Project Catalyst has already shown it is possible to dramatically reduce the impact from land-based pollution while maintaining a viable agricultural sector.

“These practices have significant potential to increase the Reef’s resilience in the future.”

Will Higham from Reef Catchments says, “We have long recognised the innovative potential of our local growers.

“Project Catalyst gives them the support they need to mitigate risk and make sustainable practices a reality, by using techniques including precision application of inputs with satellite controlled machinery, which have a positive economic and productivity outcomes.”

Coca-Cola is investing in Project Catalyst to reduce the environmental footprint of sugar, one the key ingredients in its range of beverages.

Coca-Cola South Pacific President Gareth Edgecombe said Project Catalyst is ground breaking in number of ways: “The Project has brought together the agricultural and corporate sectors; environmental and natural resource management groups – with a collective interest in promoting sustainable production for the protection of a Queensland national and international icon, while working to ensure the future viability of the sugar industry.”

The expansion of Project Catalyst will be launched in Ayr on April 4. Media is welcome between 4- 6:30 pm. Interviews are welcome before this time.

Extra information:

Growers, NQ Dry Tropics, Coca Cola, WWF and Reef Catchments will be represented at the Ayr launch.

Growers are invited to participate in Project Catalyst on a voluntary basis and are shortlisted based on a history of trialling new farming techniques and a willingness to share ideas with other growers.

