

Farming a small area

Bill Jensen

Bill Jensen has been growing fruit and vegetables in a small way near Ayr in north Queensland for 25 years.

He was born on a cane farm not far from where he is now and used to catch fish for a living. Bill grows mangoes and lychees on 12 hectares and two and a half hectares of vegetables including eggplant, chilies and cucumbers. He sells them to local and central markets.

He's interested in water quality because of his love for fishing and says he used to test creeks near farms where he lives. Bill says he's still interested in water quality and his impact on it. As a consequence he's been working on improving fertiliser use.



He used to get around the farm with a knap sack on his back and spray up and down each row but it wasn't easy to contain chemicals this way. He approached the local natural resource management group NQ Dry Tropics to get funding for a micro-sprayer - a piece of equipment that sprays directly where it's needed. He reckons he has cut down chemical use by 80 per cent. The sprayer cost \$12,000. He also spent money laser leveling out potholes.

Bill has also cut down on fertilisers by using a by-product from milling sugar cane - mill mud. It has gypsum, lime and nitrogen and he discs it into the soil once a year. He spreads mill mud at 100 tonnes to the acre. "I don't put a base fertiliser on anymore because it's already there in the soil with the mill mud. I've saved \$1500 this way." He said.

Mill mud costs \$40 a tonne. Bill says he has noticed a difference in yield since he has been using it and it grows healthier plants. It also breaks up his heavy clay soils.

Bill puts his hand up for funding although he knows it's hard to get for small properties. "I was on the committee that decides who gets funding and I know what they think. I'm trying to change their mind. The little farmer is just as important as the big farmer." According to Bill the argument that bigger farms have more impact on rivers because they're using more chemicals doesn't stack up. "Vegetable farmers shouldn't have run-off because they should all be on trickle tape."

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