



Black sigatoka outbreak just a dim memory for this progressive grower

The successful control of the black sigatoka outbreak in Tully has left district banana growers proud of their efforts in working together with the industry organization and government agencies to eradicate the disease.

Forward-thinking growers are now expressing more interest in hygiene practices and in maintaining all disease levels at or near zero throughout the district.

One such grower is Andrew Apap who grows bananas on a 37 ha property south of Tully. Mr Apap would like to see the lessons learnt from control of the disease outbreak repeated, with regular district-wide spraying efforts to keep disease down and production up.

A former broiler farmer, Andrew Apap has grown bananas for nearly 10 years, moving to the north because of the attractive North Queensland lifestyle. The farm averages around 3,000 cartons per hectare (1,200 cartons per acre) of mostly Williams Cavendish bananas, which are sold in Sydney markets.

“We weren’t directly affected by black sigatoka on our farm. It was discovered in feral bananas and on a couple of farms about seven kilometres away.

“But we had to keep up the de-leaving program and regular monitoring - and of course we couldn’t move our fruit.”

Being a part of the black sigatoka quarantine area can’t have been a positive experience only six years into Andrew’s career as a banana grower. However, he learnt a thing or two from the eradication process.

Mr Apap is wary of new theories of fungal disease control including the theory currently being circulated in the industry that by increasing the calcium and magnesium fed to your banana plants you don’t need to spray for fungi.

“This hasn’t been tried and tested in a real wet season. We haven’t had a good wet season in the district since about 2000. I wouldn’t be prepared to go down that road without a back-up spraying program,” said Mr Apap.

While not planning to expand production, Andrew Apap is concentrating on improving the quality of his bananas. He is keen to try new products backed by proper research that help him achieve his goals.

Two years ago, Andrew Apap began trials on his farm of Penncozeb 420 SC to control yellow sigatoka (leaf spot).

“During the black sigatoka outbreak we had to use organochlorines but I was not happy with the amount of oil we had to apply. In the high summer temperatures, the oil burns the fruit and tends to suffocate the tree.

“When I switched to Penncozeb 420SC I noticed the improved vigour of the crop because of less oil used per hectare.

“Penncozeb 420SC is the better option for leaf coverage. It does the job on leaf spot and with more active ingredient in every kilogram it’s better value for money.”



Testimonial

Date – 25 May 05

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Penncozeb 420SC is a fine particle mancozeb product with a nil withholding period distributed by Nufarm. Alternated with systemic fungicides, Mr Apap uses Penncozeb 420SC every 14 days in the wet season and every 21 days during the drier winter months.

Food safety and environmental requirements governing crop protection chemical usage on the farm are strictly adhered to as part of the Freshcare program that the farm embraces.

Other aspects of his farm management reflect current water issues in the district.

Despite Tully's past reputation for being the wettest place in Australia, the farm now uses bore water to keep sufficient water up to the banana plants. A lot of effort has been put into ensuring the farm is well drained without soil erosion. Packing shed water is re-cycled on to the farm.

Andrew Apap uses fertigation to reduce runoff and apply the correct amount of nutrients regularly without wasting water. Under tree drippers irrigate the bananas and provide the humid growing conditions banana plants thrive in.

Mr Apap is trialling grass inter-rows to reduce water runoff and soil erosion. These are slashed regularly rather than sprayed out as part of the integrated pest management program that operates throughout the farm.

Fruit damage is a real issue at certain times of the year and the farm focuses on training its workers in correct handling procedures and using padding to minimise the problem.

After the setbacks of the black sigatoka outbreak, Andrew Apap is now seeing the fruits of his labours improve each year.

Ends

Approval

Andrew Apap 18/5/05
Guy Perriman 25-5-05
