

Call for investment in young people's futures in the sugar industry

CANEGROWERS Mackay welcomes Queensland Youth Week this week (3-14 April) and celebrates the positive contribution made by young people on cane farms in the Mackay/Plane Creek community.

Chairman Kevin Borg said that it was his fervent wish to see the sugar industry remain an attractive option for the next generation who wanted to remain on the land and continue successfully cane farming, as have their families before them. Mr Borg is himself the father of a son who is now working on the farm after completing an apprenticeship, as well as grandfather to young grandchildren who are showing a keen interest in farming and farm machinery.

Mr Borg said the theme of this year's QYW19 was 'unlimited' – celebrating the boundless energy young people bring to their communities and encouraging them to look to the future and its possibilities.

He said that it was just the energy and optimism of young people he met in the industry that inspired him to continue to work for a vibrant future.

With the federal election possibly just weeks away, Mr Borg challenged the current and future Federal Governments to invest in regional infrastructure in the Mackay/Plane Creek region that would ensure future livelihoods for young people seeking farming careers in the sugar industry and the wider agricultural sector.

"A strong agricultural industry in a regional community not only provides valuable income for the economy but also the triple bottom line outcomes we all desire as Australian families in terms of robust regional development, a resilient and healthy social fabric, and a sustainable industry operating without harm to the environment.

"For our region at the current time that means ensuring that our past investments in water infrastructure are not wasted or mothballed, but enable us to achieve the productivity results we want on our farms. Water allocations are currently not being taken up due to the short sightedness of governments in charging too much for electricity for pumping and for the water. We all desire to see optimum irrigation water use effectiveness to increase productivity for better returns, to maintain mill viability through increased throughput, and to achieve the water quality standard vital for the environment.

"It is our children who will most benefit from the efficient low pressure irrigation infrastructure needed for the sustainable development of the industry. They will take for granted today's newest advances in innovative farming systems and telecommunications to increase productivity, efficiency, sustainability and the effective use of inputs. They will also be the ones who will adopt the renewable energy sources beyond anything we can imagine today. But all this will come to nought if farmers are held back today by not having the means to afford this better future for their kids."

Mr Borg called on governments to demonstrate confidence in the industry by investing in infrastructure that would instil confidence in the younger generation to find their futures working in the sugar industry.

Photo caption: Gerry Deguara's sons, Sam and Joe, are keen sugar cane farmers like their Dad.

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