

## Bio-Accelerated Soil Management a Hit

The benefits of a balanced management program which includes biological products was the focus of a recent farm visit by a group of growers in the region. The group set off from Kalamia Cane Growers headquarters armed with a healthy dose of scepticism and show-bags containing information on a range of products currently in use on the Haselton farm in Clare.

Along the way, some details were given as to what exactly has been done on the farm to manage a change in the structure and water holding capacity of the soil over a four year period. Growers spoke to Neville and Max Haselton and heard how they had committed to a long term program to boost the biological support to their existing growing regime. The message was that nutrient is always needed, but that a focus on also including good biological management has meant that the nutrient is less prone to run-off and loss. In particular, the availability of P has increased substantially. The farm has recorded a gradual increase in soil carbon levels over the past three years and the benefits of this in what was unstructured fine sand were evident to all visitors.

A video showing widespread use in South Africa of some of the same products was also shown and growers heard from Robert Ahern who has recently returned from a visit to South Africa to find out more of what was being done there, Robert related his surprise to find that the products being used in South Africa were made from ingredients shipped originally from VRM in Townsville-the same products which have been used on the Haselton farm. A presentation was also given by Awie De Swardt (formerly of BSES in Proserpine) who previously managed large cane holdings in South Africa using similar methods.

Neville Haselton cautioned participants not to be looking for a "silver bullet" solution. "You have to be willing to stay with it" he said. "We were ready to give it away after the first couple of seasons, even though the cost of inputs was a bit lower. But the build-up in the soil carbon convinced us to continue and now we are seeing real changes in soil quality and water holding. And our cost of P has dropped dramatically. On some parts of the farm our soil tests are showing we don't need to add P this year because of the increase in available phosphorus. "