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NORTH COAST EXTENSION MATTERS

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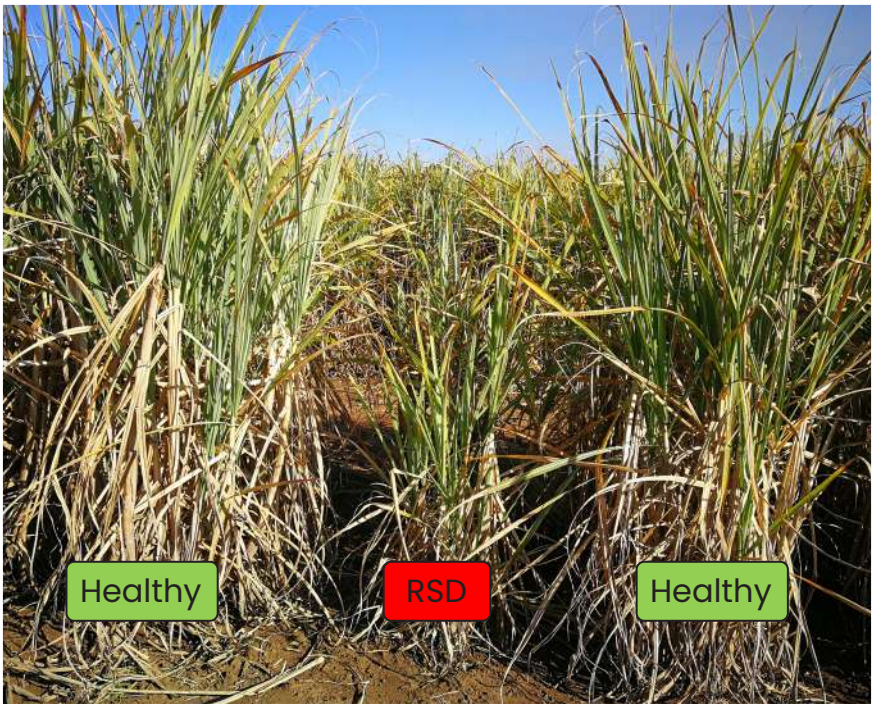
An update on the Ratoon Stunt (RSD) status on the North Coast

Historically, the North Coast has seen relatively low levels of RSD, however, **several fields** in our region have **recently tested positive** for RSD, resulting in a marked increase in the presence of RSD on the North Coast this season.

RSD is an economically important disease that can have a **serious impact on the yield** of **all varieties** when infection levels are high, particularly when the cane is stressed. The stressful conditions experienced this winter could well have exacerbated the impact of this disease on the North Coast.

In some growing regions (such as Umfolozi), the levels of RSD are of such serious concern that the LPD&VCC Committees have set in place rules that require all fields where RSD is detected, to be eradicated. It is imperative that as a region we take the management of this disease seriously to avoid the LPD&VCC instituting stricter rules that require growers to remove valuable cane fields due to RSD presence.



How is RSD spread?

RSD is spread by planting **infected seedcane** and on **contaminated equipment** e.g. cane knives, hoes, mowers (used to cut back droughted cane) and mulchers. Whilst infected stalks become thin and stunted, RSD does not have any easily recognisable symptoms and thus is often difficult to identify with the naked eye. This makes it a **dangerous disease** as it can be **inadvertently spread** by planting infected seedcane and during routine operations in the field.

Steps to manage RSD

1. Only use **certified or approved seedcane** for planting. Do not use planting material from commercial fields.

2. Know the RSD status of your fields. Growers should suspect RSD in fields that do not yield as well as expected or that yield increasingly poorly as the disease spreads with each harvest operation. Ask the Biosecurity Inspectorate to **take samples from these fields for testing**.

3. If RSD is detected, steps can be taken to prevent spread from the infected fields to the surrounding healthy fields as follows:

    - **Disinfect cane knives** (see Table 1 for disinfectants and contact times)
        - if moving from one field to another;
        - at the end of each day; and
        - important to note the contact time of the disinfectant used (and thus impact on efficacy).

    - Where possible, **RSD-infected fields should be harvested after healthy fields**.

    - When the field is eradicated, ensure the **fallow period** is sufficient to allow the effective removal of volunteers. Volunteers are an important source of RSD and newly planted fields will quickly become infected if they are not removed before planting. Commercial fields should be free of all cane regrowth for at least 3 months – this may take up to 9 months to achieve. Choose low-growing cover crops to allow for the easy identification and removal of volunteers. Tall crops, such as sunn hemp, should be avoided as volunteers are difficult to detect.

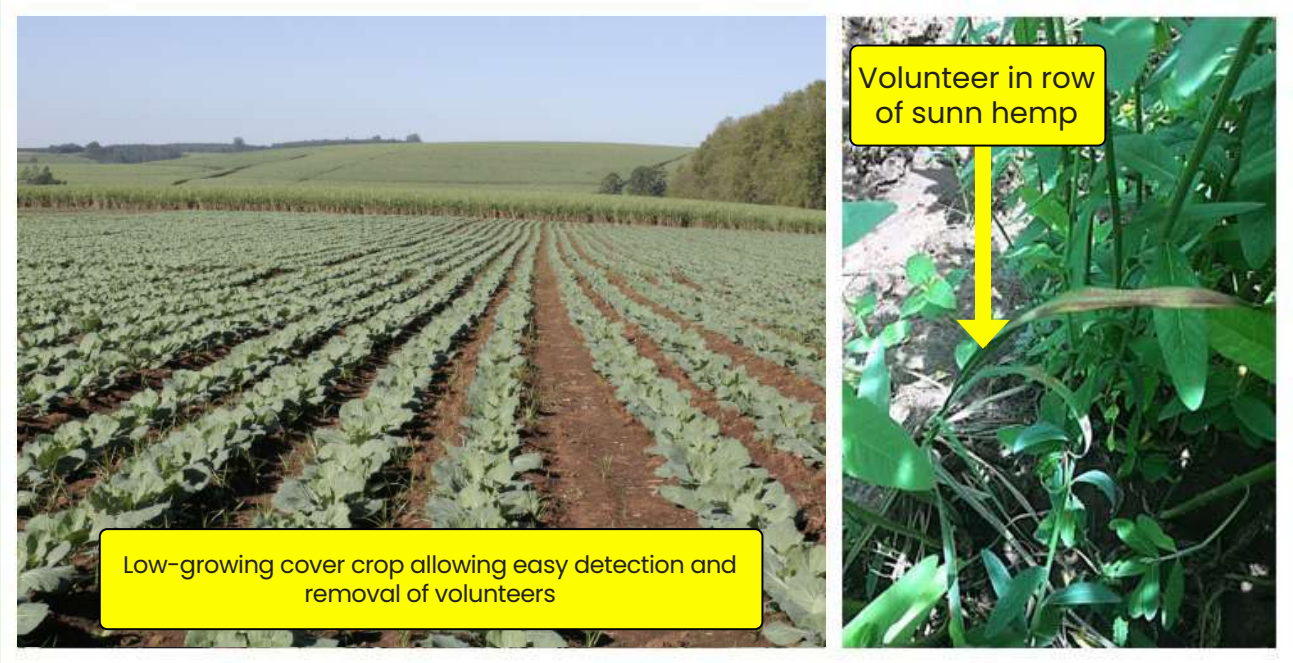


Table 1: Disinfectants for use on farm implements

Disinfectant	Active ingredients	Concentration (%v/v)	Minimum contact time	Farm implements	Mechanical harvesters	Sett cutting machines
Jeyes Fluid	Carbolic acid	10	5 min	Yes	Not recommended	Yes
Quaternary ammonium compound	Benzalkonium chloride; didecyl dimethyl ammonium chloride	3	5 min	Yes	Yes	Yes
Methylated spirits	Methanol; ethanol; denaturant	75	10 secs	Yes	No	No