

Managing Unplanned Carry-Over Cane

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INTRODUCTION

- ◆ Unplanned carry-over cane that is being experienced has caused a shift in the way of normal farming practices.
- ◆ There are several challenges that Growers experience.
- ◆ Traditionally, the Grower's harvesting plan COMMENCED with eldana infested fields (if present) or oldest cane/ratoons, followed by seasonal cane.
- ◆ Midlands cane is traditionally cut at 24 months. Growers are now forced to harvest cane older than 24 months.
- ◆ The unplanned carry-over has resulted in fields being out of cycle, creating difficulties for growers to plan their harvesting programme.

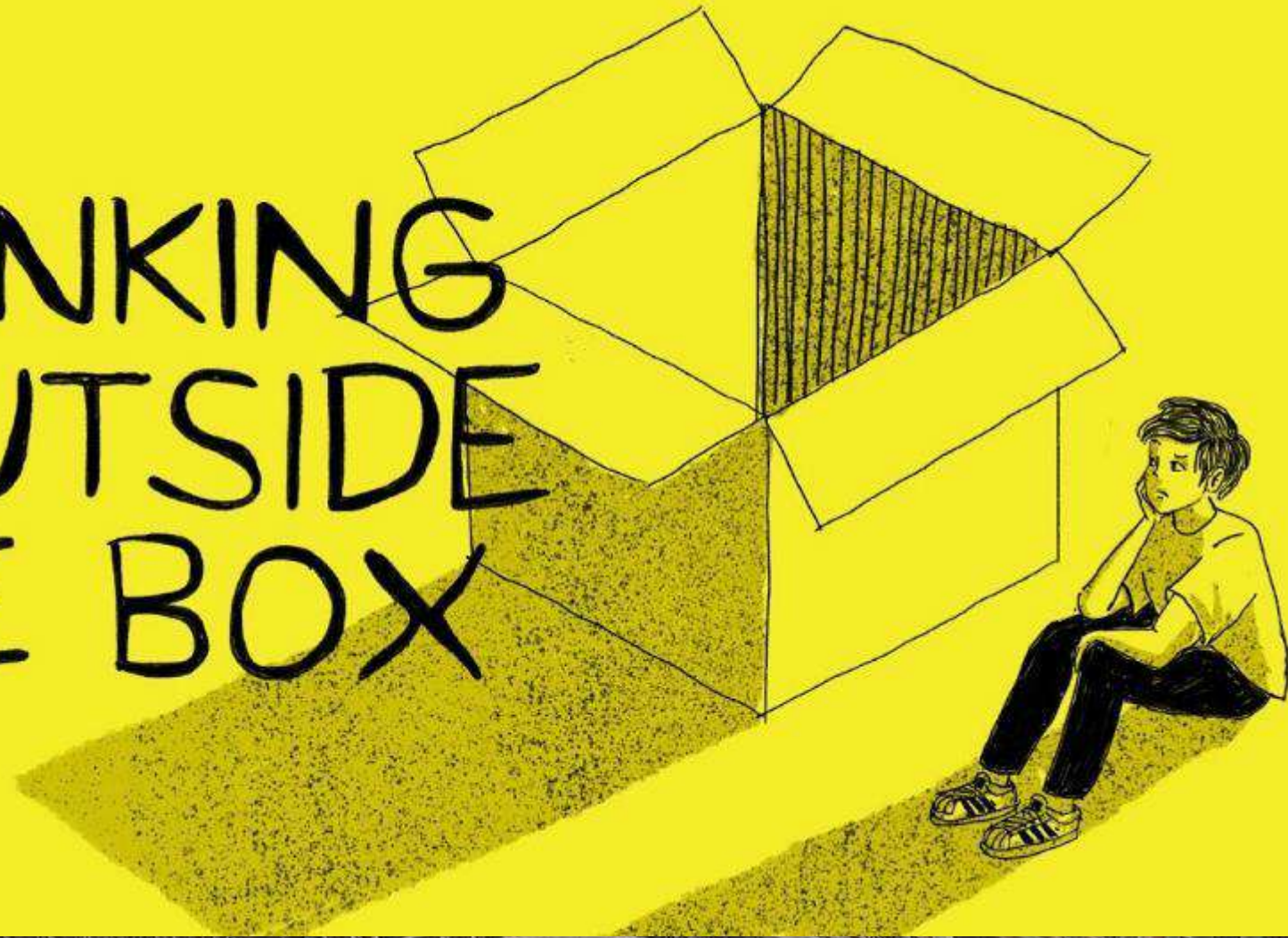




Are you telling me this will occur every season?



THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX





Harvesting Order

- ◆ Normally, a Grower harvests oldest cane first. Due to the unplanned carry-over, certain varieties are harvested outside the recommended period during the season. This causes a decline in quality e.g. N17, N25, N27, and others.
- ◆ Areas prone to frost (i.e. Midlands), last season due to unplanned carry-over, resulted in a delay -harvesting the frosted fields.
- ◆ Some new Midlands varieties recommended to be harvested at 18 months, are now being harvested at an older age.
- ◆ Vandal fires can delay the harvesting plan



Eldana Infested Cane

- Eldana carry-over spray program implementation is essential to prevent major crop loss. (Some growers didn't spray last year and had opening RV's of 4% on old cane)
- In terms of SASRI gazetted regulations, growers on the coast are advised not to have cane older than 19 months on-farm. Unplanned carry-over has aggravated the situation.
- Due to the increase in unplanned carry-over cane, this has resulted additional area requiring Eldana treatment (after scouting) which again comes at an extra cost.



Lodged Cane

- ◆ Unplanned carry over often results in cutting lodged cane for an extended period, payloads drop and transport costs increase (Especially N59 & N52)
- ◆ Harvesting lodged cane requires more man-days to achieve allocation (cutter performance declines) which negatively impacts efficiencies and cost of production.
- ◆ Cutting lodged cane can also result in loss of cane stick.



Flowered Cane

- ◆ It is recommended that Flowered cane 20%+ should be harvested before end of October. Unplanned carry-over delays harvesting and results in flowered cane having to be harvested the following season.
- ◆ Lower topping height will assist Growers to deliver a much higher quality cane.



Ripened Cane

- ◆ Unplanned carry-over cane has delayed ripening programs and is very difficult to manage. (There is a decline in quality when Fusilade-ripened fields exceed 12-14 weeks to harvest. Modus is expensive, but could alleviate this problem).
- ◆ Ripening results on carry-over cane has not been as effective as ripening “seasonal” i.e. ripened carry-over cane at 20 months vs. 14 months old cane (1.5% difference in RV). Same variety ,with similar BHTCD hours.



Impact On RV

RV % Cane

- ◆ Unplanned carry-over cane has impacted on the overall RV recovery , which results in Growers ending up with a reduced turnover/income (especially 2021-2022 season)
- ◆ Business cashflow implications are huge as the last tons across the weigh bridge at season-end are the most lucrative (fixed vs. variable costs). Unplanned carry-over dilutes Growers cashflow, as well as reducing bottom line net profit.
- ◆ Growers who normally harvest 10 000 tons or less /annum, find it difficult to stay in business with these ongoing reduced profit margins.
- ◆ Hauliers struggle to manage hugely fluctuating year-on-year fleet requirements.

April

Sept - Oct

December



Impact On RV Cont...

RV % Cane

- ◆ Some Growers have had a policy of ripening absolutely everything that is planned to harvest. Unplanned carry-over changes this practice.
- ◆ Difficulty to commit to a spring ripening program i.e. concern of carrying over ripened cane.
- ◆ The one silver lining is that, with the advent of new varieties as well as eldana spraying, some growers have worked out that they can carry over 30% of the farm. This will not cause a drop in annual tons harvested and could possibly increase yields on coastal dryland areas.

April

Sept - Oct

December



NEGATIVE Grower Comments/Concerns

"The result of which requires that we go into OD (interest costs) to finance the cashflow requirement".

"Irrigated areas not to be carried over, very expensive to irrigate carry over cane."

"N65 grows like pigs tail. N59 has poor payloads (pithiness). Drought will straighten things out."

"Normally, we harvest carry-over cane in the first 2.5 months. Due to forced carry-over, this now becomes 6 months".

"since the drought in 2015/16, we made the decision to start carrying over cane at 10% to 15% of AUC. Unfortunately, forced carry-over has resulted in an extra 12% over and above the planned 10-15%. We are now faced with dealing with >25% carry-over cane".

"Due to the lodged cane resulting in poor payloads (increased transport costs). What this also ends up doing is that when we get straighter cane, we tend to increase the loading to try and "smooth out" our payloads over the season to get back some of the payload that we lost out on and invariably, this gets confiscated by the mill group board and we lose that income as well."

"To make our daily allocation we are having to employ more cutters which comes with increased costs such as PPE, Tools, Maqewu, and all admin costs associated with employees. Last year, for argument's sake, we were cutting cane in late November and early December that we should have cut as "seasonal" cane probably by July of that year."



POSITIVE Grower Comments/Concerns

"Total tons harvested (on area under cane) vs harvesting the whole farm, has increased slightly resulting in savings made on ratoon maintenance = increased profit."

"Less ripening required on carry-over cane...however, an increase of Eldana spraying was required in the beginning of the season. With certain management practices implemented since then, approximately 5% of the carry over cane required Eldana spraying in the last 2 years. Hopefully, the area required will continue to decrease. Stumps (base cutting) need to be managed properly in lodged cane to avoid eldana remaining behind."

"it would be a good research project for SASRI Specialists to determine whether it's valuable to harvest Eldana infested cane or flowered cane first?"

"I planted more long cycle, Eldana resistance varieties for carry over. The target is to have 80% of the carry over cane as long cycle varieties."
"I start doing my Eldana counts in November of each year. Traditionally, I always started with the oldest fields first, now due to forced carry-over, I've changed my management plan to cut the highest to lowest Eldana infested fields first (which might not necessarily be the oldest fields)."



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