

Best practice soil management benefits Sunshine Coast macadamia farm

Soil management is the focus of a new video case study released this month by Growcom's Hort360 program, the best management practice program for horticulture.

Located in the Sunshine Coast hinterland, Ben Gowen helps his parents run Sahara Farms, a macadamia-producing powerhouse, with around 40-thousand trees across four properties.

With half of their trees located on the home farm on the outskirts of the Glasshouse Mountains township, Ben said urban encroachment brings a unique set of challenges to the operation.

"We've had to look into more environmentally friendly practices, whether that be through a change of management practice, new technology, new fertiliser spreaders or sprayers there is a range of possibilities that we can adopt to help reduce our impact," Ben said.

Any visitor to Sahara Farms quickly sees a willingness to embrace technology for the benefit of the farming operation.

This drive comes primarily from Ben Gowen, fifth generation on the property, and who in 2016 completed an environmental management degree.

"I think we as the next generation are a lot different in our take-up of technology. We grew up with technology, we know that it can be used in a sustainable way and it's not there to replace us, it's there to help us," Ben said.

Soil health has been a particular focus for Sahara Farm in recent years.

The company has utilised mulch and harvest trash - often left in the middle of the orchard rows after harvest - under the trees where it can contribute to improved soil carbon levels and nutrition.

"We build up the mulch to put under the trees, because that will help the soil grow and the organic matter in it will be a lot more beneficial for the trees than without it," Ben said.

Tests have revealed the high level of nutrients in leaves left on the orchard floor following harvest, so they are also chopped up with a finishing mower and spread back under the macadamia trees.

"Good soil means that there will be very little run-off," Ben said.

"If you can build up the soil profile, the feeder roots will come up and grab onto the soil and they won't let go. What you'll have is water running over the matter instead of taking the matter with it."

In preparing Sahara Farms for the modern challenges of macadamia farming, Ben Gowen has been keen to embrace industry support programs to help achieve his goals.

"Hort360 for me seems like a very good program to be able to see what my efficiencies are, where any inefficiencies might be and how I can fix them," Ben said.

"The process for Hort360 is actually quite simple. I was concerned that it might be a bit of an arduous task, but I found that it's actually quite easy to put all the information in and then when it comes time to see the report, it's easy to see where you are, how you're doing and where you can improve."

Growcom's Hort360 program, the best management practice program for horticulture, is designed to give growers a 360 degree view of their farm business operations, identifying potential risks, capitalising on business opportunities and highlighting unnecessary farm expenses.

The soil management and water quality modules are currently being delivered in south east Queensland and all horticultural growers in the Lockyer, Bremer, mid-Brisbane or Pumicestone sub-catchments are invited to take part in identifying areas of high risk in soil and water quality management. As part of this process a free property map will be provided.

Check out the video online now!

<http://bit.ly/2emkM9r>



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION OR TO BOOK A PROPERTY VISIT, PLEASE CONTACT:

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The sediment and nutrient management program is conducted in collaboration with the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

