

NEWS RELEASE

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SUGARCANE SMUT UPDATE

The sugarcane variety Q229[Ⓛ] is popular in some areas of North Queensland. This variety was rated intermediate-susceptible to sugarcane smut but recent preliminary results from smut resistance trials conducted in Bundaberg suggest that Q229[Ⓛ] should be rated susceptible. Research is continuing to obtain a more reliable rating for this variety.

BSES program leader for biosecurity, Barry Croft says growers who are considering planting Q229[Ⓛ] should be aware of this new information.

“BSES recommends that growers consider alternative smut-resistant varieties if possible. If growers decide to continue planting Q229[Ⓛ], they should take extra care and inspect the seed cane. Growers need to ensure that the seed cane is free of smut or has low levels of the disease.”

“Avoid using seed cane if this variety is planted next to a known smut-infested crop of another susceptible variety,” said Mr Croft.

Growers should also carefully inspect seed cane of the intermediate-susceptible varieties Q220[Ⓛ] and Q230[Ⓛ] commented Mr Croft.

Smut is spreading rapidly in susceptible varieties like Q166[Ⓛ] and Q174[Ⓛ] in North Queensland. Recent inspections by Mulgrave mill staff have shown that a high proportion of Q166[Ⓛ] and Q174[Ⓛ] crops are infested.

“Smut will continue to spread in the next few years and growers are encouraged to prepare a plan to replace highly susceptible varieties before they start to suffer yield losses. Removing highly susceptible varieties will reduce the disease pressure on varieties with intermediate resistance,” said Mr Croft.

The smut-resistant variety Q200[Ⓛ] continues to perform well on better class soils in the North.

The new intermediate-resistant variety Q208[Ⓛ] is performing well over a wide range of soils in all Queensland regions. Growers are encouraged to try new varieties on their farm such as the resistant variety KQ228[Ⓛ] and the intermediate-resistant Q237[Ⓛ]. Mr Croft said that limited information is available on the performance of these varieties, and suggested growers could consider planting strips of these varieties on their farm to assess their performance.

“All varieties will show some smut, especially if they are planted close to heavily infested crops of susceptible varieties. To protect seed cane, growers should obtain approved seed every year and plant the seed cane as far as possible away from susceptible varieties or surround the seed cane with rows of a highly resistant variety,” he said.

The smut epidemic will peak in the Bundaberg/Isis, Mackay and Herbert regions over the next one to two years. In these regions smut has spread to nearly all farms and highly susceptible varieties are starting to show serious levels of disease. Growers in the North can expect smut to spread rapidly and peak within two to three years.

“If growers take action now, the impact of smut should be minor. However, if the replacement of susceptible varieties is left too late, serious losses could occur,” said Mr Croft.

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About BSES Limited - BSES Limited is the leading provider of research, development and extension services to the Australian sugarcane industry.