

SoilCare Field Day -10/11/2005

at Robert Quirk's cane property Murwillumbah, NSW

Twenty-five people, consisting of SoilCare and Sunmilk members and friends, attended the field day on Thursday 10/11/05 held on Robert Quirk's cane farm at McLeods Creek. The participants heard how Robert turned a sugar cane plot from hardly producing at all to a very productive property by implementing some innovative management techniques. Robert's property is very low lying at 0.5m AHD and therefore contains drainage channels to export excess rainwater. The drainage channels have allowed the sulphur present in these coastal low lying soils to oxidise. Once oxidised sulfuric acid can be flushed out of these profiles via ground or surface water flow.



Robert Quirk, Cane Farmer

Robert said that his cane farm contained 50t of sulfuric acid/ha. However, since the implementation of various farming techniques and control of the in-drain water level, he has reduced the acid discharge by 80% and increased productivity by 50%. Robert's farm management includes: laser levelling, liming, planting into mounds, tram tracking, oat and soy bean rotations, minimum tillage, green harvest (no burning). Previously his fertiliser regime included the application of NPK (Nitrogen, Phosphorus, Potassium) at standard rates, nowadays he is not applying P at all and has reduced N and K. Robert's fertiliser regime is targeted and efficient. This is achieved by applying fertiliser direct into the root zone where it is required.

Participants examined the soil in one of the fields and judging by the reactions and comments were quite impressed. The soil had an earthy smell, good structure and earthworms were present, too. It was very encouraging to hear Robert's success story and hopefully it inspired other land holders to be innovative. The field day concluded with lunch at a local tavern where interesting conversations continued. Overall the day was very successful and everybody appreciated Robert's time and effort.



SoilCare members inspect a very healthy earthworm.