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Team of Austofts bring cane in on time for Burdekin region operation despite early season challenges

Queensland's annual sugarcane crush is nearing its end - in stark contrast to last year when constant rain caused frustrating delays - and cane farmers like Gary Stockham are breathing a sigh of relief.

"Last year, with the rain, we finished crushing mid-January, so this year we actually finished last year's crushing," Gary said. In contrast to last year, Gary and his team wrapped up their harvest in the first week of last month. ((NOVEMBER))

"In terms of yield, it wasn't too bad. It was probably down a little bit towards the end. We were cutting some cane that was cut late last year. Then the rain's come in and it knocks it around a bit. But if we finish early this year, it should make a good year for next year."

Gary started cane harvesting in 1978, and has been farming himself in the Burdekin region of North Queensland since the mid 80s, on a property he bought about 30km north of Ayr. He established Gary Stockham Harvesting which employs about 20 people during the harvest season, running four Case IH Austoft sugarcane harvesters and a fleet of Case IH Magnum, Puma and Maxxum tractors.

Gary and son Ashley have about 300ha of their own cane in this year, while also contract harvesting for up to 20 local growers.

Gary's third generation in the Burdekin, his grandfather and father both cane farmers. After leaving school, he did an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner in Giru, before buying his own farm and his first cane harvester, a Toft Robot 364 Mk II. In 2025, he's up to harvester number 23, a Case IH Austoft 9000, which carries on the Toft name but is in stark contrast to his first machine almost 50 years ago.

Toft harvesters were pioneered by Joseph and Harold Toft in Bundaberg from the 1940s, becoming a world leader in the field before rebranding as Austoft. The company was bought by Case IH in 1996 and the Austoft has been manufactured by the global brand ever since.

Between his first harvester and his 23rd harvester, there's been an enormous amount of change in the design, performance, comfort and technology.



PRESS RELEASE

"They're much more user-friendly now. Easier to operate and you can just about bring them home and go cutting with them, without a lot of modifications like in the old days. These modern harvesters are obviously faster now, too, and the technology they have does benefit our business in terms of accuracy and efficiency," Gary said.

"Comfort-wise, the difference is massive. Some of the original ones had no air conditioning in them. They're also a lot quieter and more comfortable now, so you can do more hours a day."

Marc Smith, Crop Harvesting Portfolio Manager for Case IH ANZ, said that the Case IH Austoft 9000 Harvester takes sugarcane harvesting to 'a new level'.

"The Austoft 9000 has redefined the industry's expectations of harvesting efficiency and performance, machine reliability and ease of operation.

"These machines have undergone more than 30,000 hours of field and bench testing, resulting in a powerful engine and intelligent hydraulic system that ultimately deliver greater harvesting capacity and lower operating costs.

Among the Stockham harvesting fleet today are several Austoft 9000 Series harvesters, the latest from Case IH. Features include:

- 420hp 11lt Cursor engine with lower working RPM and smart cruise option, giving better peak torque, lower fuel consumption than previous models, and its position behind the cab means a quieter in-cab experience for the operator;
- New harvest feed rate control, allowing for greater control of the length of the billet to help optimise bin weights to the mill and reduce cane juice loss;
- Fuel tank and hydraulic tanks down low to enhance stability by lowering the center of gravity of the machine;
- Module chassis giving better strength; and
- Auto Tracker function that minimises the inputs required to turn at the end of the field, and helps reduce operator fatigue.

Gary said they'd stuck with the Austoft because it met their performance and reliability needs and their local dealer, Brown and Hurley in Ayr, provided the service and expertise their business demanded.

Gary grew up in a farming business, and it was probably inevitable he would return to cane farming. Forty-seven years on, and his love of farming remains, despite the challenges.





PRESS RELEASE

"I just enjoy it. Farming's what I know, and it's a good life. It's hard work, but I don't mind it. Now my son, Ashley, has just about taken over and he's the next generation, and I enjoy watching him running things and knowing the business is in good hands."

Drawing on more than 175 years of heritage and experience in the agriculture industry, Case IH provides a powerful range of tractors, combines and balers supported by a global network of highly professional dealers dedicated to providing our customers with the superior support required to be productive in the 21st century. More information on Case IH products and services can be found online at www.caseih.com.

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Media contacts:

Kylie Galbraith
Seftons
Account Manager

Phone: +61 411 480 208
Email: kylie.galbraith@seftons.com.au

Amy Webb
CNH
PR, Sponsorship and Engagement
Specialist (AU, NZ)
Phone: +61 472 753 913
Email: amy.webb@cnh.com

