

Farms of the future

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Technology, including GPS and other precision agriculture tools, is transforming the farming sector. Farmers increasingly rely on telecommunications, computers, software and spatial information to efficiently manage their farms and improve productivity.

Agricultural consultancy

Tony Crowley is an agronomist, based south of Mackay, who offers a consultancy service with a Geographic Information System (GIS) focus. His clients are mainly sugarcane farmers, harvesting and planting contractors, millers and industry associations. Tony uses email as well as GIS mapping and videoconferencing software to connect with his clients.

'With customers from Cairns to Bundaberg, high-speed internet is critical to my business', said Tony. 'I need consistent access, otherwise I sometimes have to drive great distances to deliver reports and maps. Many of the reports and maps are in large files, so it is so important that my clients are connected to high-speed broadband.'

Technology filling the farming skills gap

The mining boom has created a local labour shortage in Mackay and farmers are looking at alternative ways of managing production, including using GIS-guided machinery. Tony can remotely manage GPS planting and harvesting equipment from his office in Mackay. 'With this labour-saving technology, I can steer a tractor from my office and do everything remotely', said Tony.

Broadband access for farmers is still variable across

Queensland, with some having ADSL2 and relying on satellite and wireless. 'Only a small percentage of the farming community are using leading-edge technology to improve productivity, but after talking to my clients,

I know many more will use it once the National Broadband Network (NBN) arrives', said Tony.

In addition to his consultancy work, Tony runs training sessions in major regional towns. Once the NBN is delivering high-speed broadband across the region (at speeds up to 1 gigabit per second), he will be able to train more of his clients using videoconferencing.

'My major customers are using all the technology they can with the current internet speeds', said Tony. 'They are hungry for knowledge and want to adopt a range of labour-saving technologies. The NBN will be very well received throughout the farming community across the whole state.'

The NBN will provide high-speed connection to educational facilities, businesses and homes right across Australia. The Department of Science, Information Technology and Innovation aims to promote and encourage the adoption and best use of broadband communications by Queensland businesses and industry sectors, to create a competitive digital economy.

For further information on broadband communication contact DSITI on 13 74 68 or visit www.business.qld.gov.au