

## **Innovation Clinic – Tackling the Problem of Agricultural Plastics**

***“How can we develop environmentally friendly, economically viable solutions to manage agricultural plastic waste?”***

This was the key question at an Innovation Clinic sponsored by the Queensland Government Department of Science, Information Technology, Innovation and the Arts at Home Hill in June.

### **The Problem**

The use of plastic in Agriculture enables primary producers across Australia to realise greater economic returns and harvest yields from their operations. Growers of sugar cane, fruit and vegetables, and other crops, rely on plastic for irrigation, weed control and maintaining high quality produce. The useful lifetime of agricultural plastics varies depending on the application, but usually complete replacement is required in a one to 10 year timeframe. Management of plastic waste in agriculture is an important environmental issue, and represents an increasing cost to Australia’s growers.

In many cases, the best practices for managing agricultural plastic waste are either not clear or not economically viable. As a result, a large proportion of agricultural plastic waste is sent to landfill, when it could be recovered and recycled. Unfortunately, illegal dumping, stockpiling and burning of plastic waste is also commonplace. Alternatives to agricultural plastics such as biodegradable materials and alternative irrigation methods are often prohibitively expensive, and some have ongoing technical issues.

### **Innovation Clinics**

Innovation Clinics are a facilitated process driving innovation and collaboration to solve industry challenges and take advantage of emerging opportunities. Innovation Clinics bring together representatives and experts from along the value chain together with leading researchers in related fields to bring fresh perspectives and thinking to challenges and opportunities and develop workable, collaborative solutions.

Presentations from AgStewardship Australia, cane growers, Growcom, the University of Queensland and CRC for Polymers and Netafim provided industry, research and supplier perspectives on the problem. Thirty-five people participated in the workshop.

### **Outcomes**

Following the Innovation Clinic recycling company Recycling Design and Technologies (RDT) has collaborated with Burdekin Shire Council and Canegrowers Burdekin to develop and advertise a temporary drop-off location for plastic fluming at the Home Hill waste transfer station in July 2014. This waste will be baled on site and removed for processing by RDT. Canegrowers Burdekin is currently investigating a second drop-off location in the Burdekin region, to be located at Greenacres.