# Central QLD 15 March 2024

## Total attendees: 17 (9 growers, 8 non-growers)

## 7 businesses representing 66% of total CQ production

Salinity Challenges:

- Growers are losing land due to increasing salinity.
- John Craney faces high levels of chlorides in his fields.

Salinity Sources:

- Geological source: mudstone that was inundated thousands of years ago.
- Environmental contributions: salt carried by ocean breezes and rain.
- Three primary sources of salt influx identified.

Salt Movement:

- Salt, being highly soluble, moves with water flow.
- Removal of trees from hilltops has exacerbated the issue by causing water to rise to the surface rather than percolating downward, raising the water table.
- Soil composition: lighter layers on top of heavier ones; sandy soil retains more salt as it dries out faster than clay soil.

Water Management:

- Aim to keep water below the root zone to reduce salt accumulation.

**Proposed Solutions:**

Caution with Quick Fixes:

- Soil amendments like gypsum and calcium carbonate may not address all types of salts and are impractical for treating large areas.

Long-Term Strategies:

- Utilising vegetation, particularly trees, to mitigate salinity.
- Trials with eucalyptus species have shown promising results (refer to Craig's report).
- Drenching systems may offer temporary relief but are not sustainable long-term.
- Slow down the salinity issue and determine necessary changes.
- Identify which trees and grasses to plant.
- Consider Fitzroy association grants.

- Monitor water flow and salt removal to avoid downstream impacts.
- Use crop models tailored to pineapples (e.g., bucket test).
- Identify optimal planting locations for economic benefit.
- Evaluate emerging carbon incentives, considering the long payback period and land use rules.
- Planting shrubs and grasses as a starting point, despite potential aesthetic concerns.

**Additional Shed Discussions:**

- While salinity remains a concern, it currently does not impact production significantly. Reprioritisation to chemical access for project trials.
- Red mite is becoming a significant issue; consider trials with chemicals registered for pineapples (e.g., paramite).
- Need for a structured mite control program.
- Concerns about losing chemicals like diazinon without substitutes.

**Field Walk Observations:**

- Russeting Issues:
- Variations in forcing times (6-day difference) resulted in different marketable fruit percentages due to heat damage.
- Heat management techniques:
- Robert NQ uses Surround but is uncertain of its effectiveness.
- John Cranny uses hay to reduce sunburn.
- MD2 variety: etherel ripening issues due to large suckers, but feasible with Carnival variety.

**Next Study Group Agenda:**

- Mite management: life cycle, monitoring, and resistance strategies.
- Mealybug management with insights from DAF pasture researcher Stuart Buck.
- Review today's discussions.
- Present a list of tree species suitable for planting (referencing the eucalyptus report).