

25 January 2012

BSES keeps watchful eye on orange rust

Inspections by BSES last week found orange rust in older leaves of Q208[®] at Plane Creek. Older leaves were moderately infected but virtually no disease was present in the younger leaves. Another crop of Q208[®] nearby had very light infection.

BSES CEO Eoin Wallis said 'These disease levels are light and are similar to those seen in 2011 in Q208[®] in the Burdekin, Mackay, Bundaberg and Maryborough districts. The younger leaves are the most active leaves on the plant, and as long as these stay free of the disease, it will have little impact on growth'.

BSES Indooroopilly scientist, Dr Kathy Braithwaite, carried out a microscopic inspection of the suspect leaves, and today confirmed that the disease is definitely orange rust.

BSES is currently inspecting crops of Q208[®] in the Northern, Herbert, Burdekin and Southern Queensland districts. 'We are closely monitoring the development of orange rust in Q208[®] to determine if the disease is increasing in this important variety. In 2011, Q208[®] supplied about a quarter of the Queensland sugarcane crop,' said Barry Croft, Program Leader – Biosecurity, based at BSES Woodford.

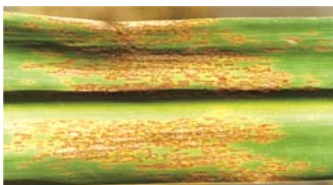
Mr Wallis said, 'We will continue to monitor orange rust on Q208[®] over the coming months. Growers should not be worried about the current levels of orange rust in Q208[®], and BSES will keep the industry informed if the situation changes'.

In 2000, orange rust caused a serious epidemic in the variety Q124. This epidemic caused serious losses throughout the Australian sugarcane industry.

Orange rust is favoured by periods of hot humid weather. Extended periods of showery overcast days during December to April are ideal for development of the disease. When the disease reaches high levels in the younger leaves it can cause yield losses of up to 40%. The rust fungus (*Puccinia kuehnii*) infects leaves and produces millions of spores which are spread by wind and rain.

In other crops, rust fungi are known to develop new strains or races that can attack previously resistant varieties. In 2000, a new strain of orange rust attacked the variety Q124 which had been grown for the previous 15 years with no sign of the disease.

BSES recommends that growers plant a range of varieties on their farms to manage the risks of any disease outbreaks. If growers have less than 30-40% of any one variety on their farm, they can quickly replace any variety that starts to be affected by a disease.



Left: Orange rust pustules in clumps.

NOTE

BSES has developed an 'Orange Rust' web page on their website that contains further information and a photo library for industry to access (bses.com.au/diseases/orangerust.html).

If growers have any questions about orange rust, they should contact their local BSES office or Productivity Service.

>>> ends

For interviews and information contact: Eve McDonald, Communications Manager, ph 07 3331 3340.

About us - BSES Limited is the leading provider of research, development and extension services to the Australian sugarcane industry.