

# Joe Cristaudo - Cane Daradgee

**Name:** Joe Cristaudo **DOB:** 1925

## **Who is in your farming family?**

My wife and I have four kids and we all lived and worked on our sugar cane farm. Our children are all grown up now and have kids of their own and we are retired from farming. We still keep chickens and grow lots of our own veggies and fruit.

## **Where is your farm and what do you farm?**

We have always grown sugar cane here at Daradgee. Now that we are retired from cane farming we lease the farm out to another cane grower.

## **What is your farming background?**

I was brought up on a farm at Fallons Road, Eubenangee where we grew sugar. As kids we all had jobs on the farm.

I started cutting cane by hand when I was 17. I cut cane for 7 seasons before I got enough money to put a deposit down on this farm here at Daradgee in 1947.

They took the hard work out of cutting cane by introducing contractors to load the cut cane. We still cut by hand but didn't have to cart it. It was the loader's job to collect the cut cane onto a special loader device fitted to the front of a tractor. Some blokes, including me, set themselves up just doing the loading job. This was about the early 1950's when the first Ferguson tractors came out. It was a good way to make a living. In 1951 I put my first crop in this farm here – I got 900 tonne!! It was a lot of cane in those days....It felt great to grow my own crop.

## **Farming Memories - What has been so special for you living on a family farm?**

In my time, things were that bad I had to help my dad in the cane, I was about 12. Labour was too expensive at about one pound a day! (\$2). Just getting water was hard work. There was a 70 foot well and we had to pull all the water up by hand. Enough water for four horses, and a cow – not to mention the rest of the family. Us kids used a half a 4 gallon (16L) kerosene tin to pull up the water, the tin was cut in half so us kids could lift it. Our fuel came in kerosene tins and we were re-used for everything in those days, these days we have buckets. Even water had to be pulled up for the garden – that was the kids' job.



It was hard on the women too. There was no electricity. First thing in the morning you would have to light the wood stove, and work by kerosene lamp. Wood all had to be chopped and the kids did that too. Wood was collected from the bush and we sawed it up by hand then split it with an axe....we knew to collect Johnstone River hardwood...it made good burning wood.

Mum used to cook for a gang of 8 men, for money. She would mend clothes at night by the light of the hurricane lamp. This was while she had two young babies of her own to care for. It was very hard for women in those days. A loaf of bread was delivered for sixpence a loaf, but for 16 shillings mum could get a big bag of flour and make her own bread. It was much cheaper to do it that way but a lot more work. We would raise chickens, turkeys to sell and eat ourselves. Money was scarce.



There was a wood cutter years ago who cut timber up in the scrub, transported it into town to sell it to households and even the baker, who relied on timber for their stoves. If anyone ordered a load of wood, he'd deliver it.

There used to be little places all around, a shop at Garradunga, a shop at Daradgee, a butcher at Daradgee – they are all shut now. Eubenangee and Daradgee Schools would get together at the Garradunga hall for their fancy dress balls.

Before I brought my own farm, my father bought an old truck and one of my friends and I used to cart mill mud from the mill at night time. They never had a contractor to take the mill mud away from the mill in those days. It was left to each farmer to collect it when it was their turn. If you didn't get it when you were supposed to, it would drop to the ground at the mill and then you would have to shovel it all up. It was a cheap fertiliser but there was a lot of work attached to getting it. We had to go to Goondi mill to collect the mud. The roads were terrible, not like today, very little lighting, everything was done by the light of a hurricane lamp.

We got the electricity in 1947. I was a 22 year old man then. All the holes for the electricity poles were dug by hand...can you believe that. Men had to dig down about 6 foot (2m) and stand the big poles up. It was a big job. Nobody does anything by hand anymore.

There wasn't enough hours in the day – sometimes we used to start at 3 am in the morning to get everything done.

When the land was first cleared here for cane it was a very difficult job. The stumps left from the trees were so huge they were left in the ground and the cane planted amongst them. It was called 'cane holing' – planting cane anywhere you could, in the pieces of clear dirt.

The rail motor was very important. All the fertiliser used to come to Garradunga and you had to go and get it. I had the carrier's licence for Garradunga. It was my job to deliver all the stuff coming by train - lime, fertiliser. There was even a Station Mistress. Everything came in bags. Someone had to unload it off the train onto the siding, from the siding onto the truck, from the truck onto the farm. There was a lot of handling alright, I still have my special 'bag barrow' done in the shed. Many people could earn a living delivering all this stuff – old time courier drivers! Lots of lifting and these guys had big muscles on them alright.



### **Living with Kerosene**

Kerosene was used to power machinery and run lights. 'Power' kerosene was produced and ordered separately to 'light' kerosene. Farmers would order kerosene from the fuel distributor. Fuel came in lots of four 4 gallon tins, boxed up in a timber crate and delivered. At first, each farm only had one tractor, and much of the work was still done by farm horses. But by the mid 50's most of the horses were gone and all the work was being done by tractors fuelled by kerosene. Kerosene tins were re-used for many things and even flattened out and used to line houses and keep the weather out.

### **Horses on the Farm**

Sugar farming in those days relied on horse power. A big property in those days would have needed 16 horses. The horse did everything on the farm, ploughing, drill out to plant, cultivate or scarify, everything was done by horse. The horse was always tended to first, you didn't go inside to rest and eat until you had feed and watered your horses and put them away for the night - then it was your turn. "Lion" was a best work horse ever. He was big, sort of a Clydesdale breed.

As kids we had a pony to get to school, with 3 of us on his back. He'd happily take us down to Eubenangee school and back home but if you tried to make him go in a different direction, he would not go. The school only had one teacher, old Bailey, there was 52 kids. He had prep to scholarship (Grade 8). Very few kids went past that grade, most kids left school and went to work.

Picking up stray cattle or horses and selling them was illegal, but plenty of people did it. We had a farm up on Fallons Road in those days. Apparently our horses were out running on the road, and somebody rounded them up and took them up to Edmonton sugar mill and sold 'em up there. We didn't know till about 2 years after that they were up there. They had taken two of our best horses and that was a big loss in those days. We only had 4 horses all together.

**Farming Life Experiences - Family farming presents many challenges which often involve considerable effort to resolve. What experiences can you recall which presented you and your family with a significant problem?**

### **Cane Beetles**



Years ago the cane grubs were really bad. Our property was up near the bush and the cane used to virtually get eaten out every year by grubs. You would go to all the trouble of planting and the beetles would fly and drop into the cane, lay their eggs and hatch into grubs.



Turkeys are another story. My dad used to take our turkeys into the cane and try to get them to eat the cane grubs. The cane toads were supposed to eat the beetles ...but that didn't work....the stupid people didn't try it out first. Dad would call out to the turkeys to eat the beetles in the early morning before the sun came up, once the sun was up the beetles would fall down into the cane and bury themselves in the dirt. I'm not sure it worked very well.

There was even a bounty on cane grubs and beetles in those days – a four gallon tin would fetch 16 shillings and that was a lot of money. A local farmer, Mr Robinson, was appointed by the Pest Board from the mill to issue a receipt for collected beetles and grubs. Then you'd take that bit of paper into the mill to be paid. Poisons eventually came out for the grubs and it turned the sugar cane industry around. Different areas were more susceptible to the beetles, if you were closer to the bush, you got more beetles. Luckily our farm here, was a good area for growing cane with less trouble from beetles than other areas.



### **Looking Back - What lessons were learnt? What has your farming life taught you?**

In my time, farming was a good life. You could work and see some results for your work. In those days you did a lot of work by hand, now it's mostly done by machinery. It's a lot easier but you are living on a knife's edge. In those days, you could carry your losses, or things like cyclones. Cane is a hardy crop and you could always count on some return, you never had a complete loss. In days gone by you could make an ok living out of 1000 tonne of cane, but today, you need 10-15 000 tonne of cane to be economical so the risks are much higher. That's the way it's gone with the economy everywhere – get big or get out – all the little places or businesses are gone.

But some farmers, like us, never expanded, instead we educated our kids. We wanted to make sure our kids had other options besides the farm and could come back if they wanted to. When I was a boy I missed a lot of school because I was working on the farm. I insisted my kids had an education first.

