



## Peanut crop dream being revived as early research in northern Australia shows promise

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The peanut industry's long-held dream of growing a 100 per cent Australian crop has been revived, thanks to a new trial to find multiple uses for the crop. CQ University (CQU) researchers are in the second year of a trial to use the top of the peanut plant as livestock feed and the peanuts themselves as human foods like peanut butter. The trial is also trying to establish if more growers in northern Australia would be willing to grow peanuts.

Crops are being grown in Katherine in the Northern Territory and Emerald, Home Hill, Tully and Georgetown in Queensland. The idea is to give growers an extra revenue stream. "There's a really great benefit to [the trial] in that there is a value that can be taken from the crop early in the season," CQU researcher Tienieke Trotter said.

"That's money in a farmer's pocket before waiting five months before you get a final product."

### Showing promise

The top of the peanut plant known as the biomass is being cut and turned into hay before the peanuts are harvested. "That treatment has actually not had a particularly negative effect on the quality and yield that we're seeing at the end of the season," Dr Trotter said. "We're really happy with the trial and it's showing some really good promise."

While more research will be needed to determine the true value of using peanut biomass as livestock feed, the results look good. "The biomass itself is really high in nutrients, it's high in protein and so it's a really good feed for livestock," Dr Trotter said. Emerald grower Aaron Kiely has planted 1.2 hectares of peanuts on his family's cotton farm. In the first year of the trial, he planted 13 different varieties of the legume crop. This time they've narrowed it down to the more successful varieties. Mr Kiely said with rain soon after planting he was expecting a decent crop. "This season has had a good start," he said. "They should power out of the ground. "I do really enjoy growing peanuts. They're really rewarding crops to grow."

### Struggle to establish industry

Australia peanut imports thousands of tonnes of peanuts each year from countries like Argentina. Peanuts have been grown domestically since the 1800s but a commercial industry was only established in the 20th century. They were first grown in Kingaroy in the South Burnett and now are grown as a secondary crop for sugarcane farmers in Bundaberg and by some growers in Tolga. Peanut butter giant Bega Foods has aspired to become less reliant on imported peanuts for years; however, efforts to establish a fully-grown Australian crop have been unsuccessful. Mr. Kiely said at their farm in Emerald in the Central Highlands they have grown peanuts as a commercial crop before but have not been viable for years. "Peanuts used to be a major crop here around eight or 10 years ago," he said. "With water availability over the last seven or eight years, it's dropped off. Mr. Kiely said at its peak more than 1,200 hectares of peanuts would have been planted in the region but now a lot of that land is used for citrus crops.

CQU post-doctoral research fellow Drew Portman said the area to grow peanuts has shrunk across the country. "You can successfully grow peanuts in other areas which we've proven," he said. "One of the challenges is the costs of transport to places for processing." Currently, peanuts supplied to Bega Foods for processing have to be sent to Kingaroy. Mr. Portman said the hope was to get enough growers to plant peanuts in northern Australia long term. "If you can get enough farmers to be able to grow peanuts in these areas viably then it may be viable to build [processing] plants in those areas," he said.