



World Association of
Beet and Cane Growers



NEWS FROM WABCG

EDITORIAL

A few days ago, the whole family of sugar cane and sugarbeet growers met once again for our annual event, with ISO, in London.

It was a great opportunity to share the work our asso-



ciations are doing to improve sustainability – in all its dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. We had an excellent overview of what our associations have already done around the world, and what our challenges are for the coming years. Sharing knowledge is the reason

for being of WABCG, and I think this meeting was a good illustration of that.

I also appreciated the study we did on the opportunities – but also the risks – of carbon farming applied to our production. We have benchmarked our feelings, and practices on this issue and I keep in mind how effective our production is in minimising fossil carbon emissions.

Our crops are among the best in terms of diversification potential: in addition to sugar, sugar beet and sugarcane and their coproducts can produce ethanol, electricity and biogas.

Every effort must be made to find new outlets for this production - not only to increase the economic benefits of our crops, but also the environmental benefits!

David Thompson, President
WABCG

DECEMBER 2023

NEWS FROM WABCG:

TO BE RETAINED FROM LONDON

The World Association of Beet and Cane Growers, which counts 36 cane and beet growers' associations in 34 countries, met on 20th November 2023 in London (United Kingdom) and concluded its work with the following final statement.



“Sugar beet and sugarcane growers dedicated their working day to comparing their achievements in terms of sustainability over the last 10 years and their ongoing challenges. **They recalled that sustainability can only be achieved by focusing on its three pillars: environmental, social and economic.**

Regarding environmental sustainability, they recall that innovation can bring solutions to many different challenges raised by civil society. Innovative technologies and data management should be promoted by a constant dialogue between growers' associations and technical institutes, with the support of governments. In addition to sugar, ethanol, electricity or biogas production, cane and beet have exceptional diversification potential that should be promoted to reduce fossil GHG emissions in the context of climate change.

Regarding social sustainability, they recall that growers' associations, should be acknowledged as the essential body to represent growers in the sugar supply chain, allowing them to be heard and respected. These associations are the necessary interface between governments, consumers, and civil society to constantly adapt and improve farming practices.

Regarding economic sustainability, they consider that the current improved conditions on the sugar market should be used for investment to tackle constraints of production, within the entire supply chain.”



NEWS FROM SOUTHERN GERMANY

Especially in the sugar beet growing regions of Baden-Württemberg and Franconia, but also in Rhineland-Palatinate, a gradual and massively increasing brightening of the sugar beet leaf apparatus has become visible since mid-August. The fact that this is not the viral



yellowing that occurred particularly violently in 2020 was quickly visible, noticeably because, among other things, the lightening did not have the typical circular shape of the viral disease.

Initially, there were many indications that it could be the

bacterial disease SBR (syndrome of low sugar content), which has been observed in southwestern Germany for more than 10 years. However, only a relatively slow north-eastward spread had been recorded there so far. The rapid development of symptoms and the dramatic increase in affected areas suggested that the problem arising in 2023 cannot be just a simple expansion of SBR.

In laboratory tests of diseased beets, it was found that

in addition to the bacterium that triggers the SBR, at least one other pathogen was often found. Although this is also a bacterium, it belongs to a different genus, which had previously only



appeared in potatoes, apples, and wine. These bacteria are extremely small, have no cell walls, and cannot survive outside of plants and insects. These seemingly

primitive characteristics make it difficult to find control or avoidance strategies.

During the beet tests before the campaign start and in the ongoing trial activities of our beet cultivation experts, it became apparent that the problem of this year's disease infestation goes far beyond the lightening of the leaves. The infested sugar beets quickly lose foliage over time. Fine roots, which are essential for water and nutrient absorption, also die. The beet body has an exceptionally low cell pressure, so the plant tissue takes on a rubbery consistency. This effect is particularly noticeable at the root tip. As a result, the beet no longer sits firmly in the ground, but is child's play to pull out. It is to be feared that this change in properties could also significantly reduce the storability after harvesting. This raises questions with regard to this year's harvest, logistics and processing, especially at periods of hot temperatures. These are to be countered with organisational measures, insofar as this is possible.

The challenge for future growing years now is to find ways to control or at least contain the new beet disease. In the long term, of course, the focus is on plant breeding, which has always managed to cope with

newly emerging problems, such as rhizomania or nematodes.

However, this is not an easy task, because it is a diffuse clinical picture with potentially extraordinarily

complex triggers. The basic solution is therefore likely to take some time.



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As an interim measure, it is therefore necessary to investigate whether agronomic measures such as tillage, crop rotation and the use of insecticides can have an effect on rubbery beet disease. It may be possible to draw on the experience gained a few years ago in Serbia, Croatia, and other Balkan states with this or at least a similar-looking beet disease.

Due to the paramount importance of the problem in the catchment areas of the sugar factories in Offenau and Ochsenfurt, but also because of the feared further spread of the disease to other regions of Germany and Europe, a summit meeting was convened in Offenau at the end of September. At the invitation of the Board of Trustees for Testing and Consulting in Sugar Beet Cultivation, more than 50 experts from associations, sugar companies, breeders and science came together to exchange their knowledge on the problem and to agree on a joint approach to gum beet disease.

In order to ensure that the pending issues are treated with as a matter of absolute priority, a ten-member "Task Force on Rubbery Beets" has been installed, which defines the necessary steps, awards appropriate research and research contracts, and compiles the results and circulates them within the participants. It has started its work in the first week of October.

Many companies and organisations in the German sugar industry have pledged their support for this project. They have all recognised that it can only be a matter of time before the problem reaches other sugar beet-growing regions. The comprehensive approach and the broad support give reason to hope that this challenge for sugar beet cultivation can be successfully overcome, as has always been the case in the past.



More information:
watch the youtube movie here (English subtitles can be enabled under settings).



Next meetings

WABCG Council

18-21 June 2024

Fargo, USA

Save the date!

Fred Zeller, Executive Director
Verband Süddeutscher Zuckerrübenanbauer (VSZ)
Germany

The World Association of Beet and Cane Growers (WABCG) is the international organisation which groups together the national and regional associations of sugar beet and sugar cane growers at international level. WABCG has 36 member associations and unites over 5 million sugar beet and sugar cane growers from the five continents. WABCG is present in over 30 countries, producing 60% of world sugar production.