



World Association of
Beet and Cane Growers



NEWS FROM WABCG

EDITORIAL

Here we are at this blessed time of year, which gives us the opportunity to wish those around us happiness and to remember what the past year offered us.

WABCG members will remember 2023 with many souvenirs: a fantastic trip to Cali, Colombia, kindly



hosted by Procaña, and a wonderful meeting in London last November.

For many of us around the world, this has also been the year of better prices for our

crops, with the world market in the best mood for five years. May this continue into the next campaign!

2024 is now upon us and it will be a special year for me: the year I will welcome you to my farm in Fargo, USA, next June!

My team and I are preparing a great programme and I am sure you will enjoy this new opportunity to bring the family together!

May the coming year bring success and prosperity to each of you and to our crops: ***I wish you all, dear colleagues, and your families, a very happy New Year!***

**David Thompson, President
WABCG**

JANUARY 2024

NEWS FROM FRANCE

Our campaign in France is now coming to an end, with almost

380,000 hectares harvested and an average yield of 83 tonnes of sugar beet (at 16°) per hectare. This is in line with our 5-year average, which is good news as the campaign has been really challenging.



It started in January when we learned that we wouldn't be able to use seeds neonicotinoid-coated - even though the losses in 2020 are still on everyone's minds (almost 30% less yield!). This had a big impact, and acreage fell by a further 5%. Another factory has closed, the last in the Nord department (which would have celebrated its 150th anniversary last June). Fortunately, the beet growers can supply a neighbouring factory, but we must recognize that France is the country that has suffered most from the end of the EU quota regime, with 20% of our factories (5 out of 25) closed since 2017.

During spring, sowing was particularly late because of repeated rains, and took place over 2 months, until mid-May (unprecedented!). And, at the end of the summer, the very wet weather resulted a very high Cercosporiosis pressure. In the end, the yellows disease remained very localised (almost 2,000 ha affected), and the current average final yield therefore appears to be a real success!



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This yield, along with the rise in sugar prices, means that growers can look forward to a return to profitability for sugar beet in 2023, despite the increase of our production costs. After several extremely difficult years for our entire sector, this year marks a revival. But even so, this revival remains fragile, and we do not anticipate any major increase in French acreage next year.

Indeed, there are still major technical difficulties. Luckily, our National Research and Innovation Plan (PNRI), which was launched in 2021 to find solutions to the problem of yellows, has been extended for another 3 years. And we can now hope that sufficiently resistant and productive varieties will be on the market by 2025-2026. In any case, it is innovation - whether technical, digital or genetic - that will provide part of the answer to the European Union's environmental ambitions. But we must be clear that this ambition is extremely challenging – and can be only achieved if our market is sufficiently protected!

And on this issue, as on the issue of managing the volatility of the European market, we can only say that nothing has been done. Worse still, we are making it even more fragile. With the laudable aim of supporting our Ukrainian neighbours, the European Union has decided to remove all barriers to imports of agricultural products produced in Ukraine. While we understand the need to support these people, we would point out that European farmers unfortunately do not have the resources to accept that this situation will continue in the long term. Indeed, from the 20,000 tonnes of Ukrainian sugar allowed into the EU before the war, we received 400,000 tonnes last year and are now forecasting 700,000 tonnes this year – a

sugar that is produced under conditions that won't be possible in the European Union ! It is therefore our responsibility to take measures to limit the impact of these volumes on our farmers. These are big issues, but we are confident in the collective will to rise those challenges. And that is our roadmap for 2024, which is only just beginning: very happy new year!

Guillaume Gandon, Vice-President
CGB (Confédération Générale des Planteurs de Betteraves), France



Flooded fields in Nord-Pas de Calais (Northern France)





NEWS FROM MALAWI

The year 2023 had both the bad as well as the good with the bad dominating.

Absence of a law to govern the sugar industry in the country

The sad reality of the absence of a regulatory framework for its sugar industry in Malawi, the only country in Southern and Eastern Africa, continued to dominate the sugar industry.

From 2015, the sugarcane growers association has engaged all manner of stakeholders in the industry, in consultations on a sugar industry bill. At the beginning of the year 2022, after years of such consultations, the association handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture a draft of the bill. The belief was that the bill would be presented to parliament during the said year. To date the Ministry has yet to submit the bill to parliament.



The final draft bill seems to have been captured at the ministry by major stakeholders. In September this year, the Ministry organized a national validation conference, which was later discovered to have been funded by one of the millers, obviously compromising the process.

Sugar import licensing

The sugar sector also learnt that the government had issued sugar import licenses to a foreign owned company contrary to the Control of Goods Act. Calls to the relevant ministry to have the licenses withdrawn / cancelled have proved futile.

Reduced incomes resulting from membership subscription policy changes

At its Annual General Meeting held in January 2023, representatives from members associations voted to reduce funding to the national association and in-

creased funding to regional associations. This has affected operations of the national association secretariat to the extent that it is not able to undertake some of its mandatory functions. The association has intensified efforts in resource mobilization for institutional and grower capacity building projects. WABCG members are generously requested to assist.

Effects of devaluation on production costs and profitability

The year 2023 saw continued loss of value of the domestic currency (the kwacha) resulting from trade imbalances. Early November saw the currency being devalued by a whopping 44%. The devaluation coming just at the onset of the agriculture season resulted in immediate increases in cost of all inputs. While the Estimated Ratable Sucrose Price was increased by 14% by one of the major millers, it is expected that profitability for growers will significantly go down as a result of the increased costs of production resulting from the devaluation.

**Alex Mtengula, Chief Executive Officer,
Sugarcane Growers Association of Malawi (SUGAM),
Malawi**



Sugarcane field at time of harvesting



NEWS FROM DENMARK

If we turn back the time 4 months, we thought the campaign 2023 would be a relative short one with a closing date around the 8th of January – and we had no expectations about frozen beet and problems with lifting and delivering beet. But it did not quite turn out

that way!



The start of the campaign was delayed one week at one of the factories and the second factory started two weeks later – both due to a late finish of major works with renovating and installing of new equipment at the two factories. On top of this both factories had prob-

lems in the beginning to get the new equipment working at full capacity and we lost several production days in total. At the same time we have seen a yield above our 5-years average, which is more than expected after a late sowing and dry months in May and June. But excellent weather conditions in September really got the beet growing.

Beet lifting is normally running at full speed from around the 10th-15th of November, where beet is stored in the clamps for later delivery, but heavy rain delayed the lifting of the beet as many fields were too wet. The rain changed directly into a period with frost from the 28th of November, which is early for Denmark. Around 30 % of the beet were still in the ground at that time.

The advice was to leave the beet in the ground for them to regenerate after the period with frost unless the beet should be delivered within a few weeks. After a few weeks with frost the temperature rose to warmer conditions which could damage beet in the clamps if they were harmed by the frost. Here in the beginning of January we have experienced new heavy rainfall followed by snow and severe frost.

The growers have used all the “windows” in between rain and frost to lift the beet, and damaged/rotten beets are now removed from the sides of clamps where it is necessary. Status here the 5th of January

is that we still have around 5 % of the beet in the ground and it is impossible to lift them the coming 10 days due to very wet conditions and now frost in the ground. There is still time as we expect the campaign to run until the beginning of February – and we hope for a little more luck with the weather the coming weeks.

Years are never the same when you are a farmer!

Troels Frandsen,
President Danish Beet Growers Danske Sukkerroeddyrkere
(Danish Beet Growers), Denmark



Beet well recovered in the field after the first period with frost – but new rain and frost have delayed the lifting once again.