World Association of
Beet and Cane Growers

NEWS FROM WABCG

MARCH 2024

EDITORIAL

As farmers, we know that our income is made up of price and yield. And I have to say that, today, anywhere in the world, it is not easy to predict these elements for sugar cane or sugar beet!

Let's look at the price. Raw sugar rose 10% in January and lost 5% in February, mainly due to speculators trying to anticipate whether sugar would rise or fall again... With such market movements, predicting the value of our beet or cane for the coming month is quite a challenge!

Then let's look at yield. Again, we know how difficult this is to predict - even more so when we know that an El Niño event is likely to occur next month...

And if you add to this the uncertainty about costs, with fertilizer prices divided by two after being multiplied by 3 or 4 last year, I sometimes feel like I am playing the lottery when I sow my fields!

Nevertheless, I will be planting my beets, here in North Dakota, in a few weeks' time! Because, as farmers, we know very well that these uncertainties are part of our job. Sure, a lot of the uncertainty rests on our shoulders. But, knowing that this will certainly be more and more the case in the years to come, our buyers and our politicians need to understand that, sometimes, our shoulders need more than just a friendly little tap!

David Thompson, President
WABCG

Save the dates!

WABCG Council
18-21 June 2024
Fargo, USA
Registration is open!

WABCG/ISO Consultation
25 November 2024
London, United-Kingdom

Check our new website!

News from Mauritius

Well before the United Nations (UN) adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, the Mauritian sugar cane industry, alive to the market's growing appetite for sustainable production and consumption patterns and keen on shoring up its competitiveness in the wake of the dismantling of trade preferences it had previously enjoyed, embarked on a transformative journey to embrace green initiatives.

Mauritius has a long history in sustainable sugar cane farming. About 80% of the island's agricultural land is devoted to sugar cane plantation, emphasising the importance of this multifunctional crop in the small island state. The sugar cane industry has for long favoured ecofriendly practices. Except for very few cases and on a limited scale, insecticides are not used, with biological control of insect pests being made possible using beneficial insects or natural predators. As early as 1763, for example, the mynah bird was successfully introduced from India to control locusts. Fungicides are only used for treating sugar cane cuttings at planting, herbicides are recommended for large-scale applications after having been thoroughly evaluated and fertilisers are used after soil and foliar analysis to ensure that the right amount is applied to avoid polluting streams and aquifers. Research and development of more drought-resistant varieties have contributed to reducing the average water footprint of sugar cane. Cultural practices such as minimum tillage and contour planting have been adopted so as not to disturb the topsoil and to reduce erosion in sloping areas. The practice of trash blanketing has been implemented to preserve soil moisture and reduce the emergence of weeds. Dual row planting that minimises herbicide applications is being increasingly adopted while legume plantation during the fallow break is gaining momentum to boost soil fertility. Save for a limited acreage that is accidentally burnt, green cane harvesting is the norm. A recent study has revealed that these practices taken together, translate into a negative carbon footprint of 0.17 kg CO2e per kg sugar from farm to local port, especially when factoring in the emissions saved by the amount of electricity produced and exported to the national grid from bagasse, the fibrous residue left after the cane has been crushed.

To bring to light the industry's achievements and to provide customers with credible assurances, certification to global, best-in-class, sustainability standards and subscription to independent sustainability reporting frameworks were identified as the vehicles best suited to the Mauritian context. However, producer diversity meant that a unique standard could not be adopted. The smallholders were thus encouraged to apply for Fairtrade certification, whereas the corporate growers and mills opted for Bonsucro accreditation and agreed to make public sustainability disclosures using Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) principles. Consequently, Mauritius is today one of the leading exporters of Fairtrade-certified sugar and the only sub-Saharan cane sugar producing origin to have mills and farms certified to the Bonsucro standard. About a third of

the island's sugar production is currently certified sustainable and the vision is to have the entire cane sugar industry accredited in the coming years.

Considering the tenet whereby what gets measured gets managed, evaluative studies on sustainability standards as drivers of change have been undertaken and have demonstrated positive impact at agricultural, environmental and economic levels, thus buttressing the resilience of producers in the face of unprecedented challenges and often difficult market conditions. It is now established that a certified farmer is more productive and efficient and less likely to abandon sugar cane cultivation compared to one operating outside a certification system. Continuous education and mandatory training of producers have brought a better understanding of biodiversity-linked risks and effectively supported the increased acceptance and implementation of good agricultural practices, including enhanced usage of environment-friendly biofertilisers. Labour and safety conditions have, moreover, improved, with workers also benefiting from the premium obtainable from certified sugar sales.

While certification schemes have certainly helped raise the bar in the industry, the next step would be to raise the floor. Indeed, the continued sustainable growth of the sugar cane industry will require extensive collaboration between farmers, mills, traders, end-user companies and consumers. Though a lot remains to be done, significant progress has been made and the lessons learnt will be invaluable to chart the way ahead.

Chetanand Dookhony, Head of Compliance & Producers' Service
MSS (Mauritius Sugar Syndicate), Mauritius

News from North Germany

Main time for sowing sugar beet was from mid to end of April. This was much later than usual due to wet conditions in March. Growing season started with cold temperatures in May and continued with hot weather in June, both month with very small rainfall. But the lack of growth in spring was compensated in summer with good growing conditions. Control of aphids and other insects was managed well with the few available active substances. In fall, leaf diseases like *Cercospora* were a huge problem in the fields triggered by warm and wet weather. With rubbery taproot disease and Syndrome Basses Richesses (SBR) two new diseases appeared first time on only a few fields. Both are triggered by bacteria which are spread by cicadas.

Sugar production started at the beginning of September with organic beet for two weeks in one factory. The beet yield was very good with almost 58 tonnes per hectare. Not satisfying was the sugar content with less than 16 percent.

Beet harvest and logistic was quiet challenging over the whole period. Lots of rain during harvest from September to December led to many interruptions and problems on the field and in factories as well. Due to frost periods in December and January the quality of the sugar beet suffered even in well-covered clamps so that not all beets could be processed. In the end, some beet fields couldn't even be harvested. Mid of February, a long campaign came to an end after about 160 days. The average beet yield with more than 81 tonnes per hectare was higher than expected.

The sugar content with 16,6 % left much to be desired. Overall, the sugar yield was at long term average.

On the political side, German beet growers are worried about high import volumes of sugar coming from the Ukraine. There is no doubt that the Ukraine needs the united support of the European community. But since duty free imports without volume restrictions are allowed, the amount of sugar coming from the Ukraine raised from 20.000 t in the past to expected 650.000 t in the current marketing year. European beet growers are afraid of a destabilisation of the EU-sugar market. The market situation now is still good for beet sugar. But it is a question of time until prices will fall. Nevertheless, beet prices for 2023 will be very satisfying.

Also, the reduction of plant protection is still a big issue in the EU. A regulation about reduction goals failed in Parliament and is postponed. The important active substance triflusulfuron for weed control has gotten no prolongation and can be used in the 2024 growing season for the last time. Glyphosate got a prolongation for ten more years on EU-Level, but the German government tries to create additional restrictions and limitations for future applications. A further political discussion is ongoing to classify new breeding techniques no longer as genetic technologies. That would be an important step to find breeding solutions for e.g. better resistance against pests and diseases and use less plant protection products.

These issues were discussed with our beet growing members on traditional Winter assemblies. As in the past sugar companies and beet grower organisations celebrated these events in cooperation. On 35 meetings in February over all growing regions, about 2.400 beet growers used this service for information about campaign, beet reception and political issues as well as for personal contact and communication.

Now we are already focused to the coming campaign. In 2024 North German Growers will slightly increase the beet area with hopes to remunerative market and growing conditions.

Dr. Heinrich-Hubertus Helmke, General Secretary,
North German Sugar Beet Growers (DNZ), Germany

Eckhard Hinrichs: President of the Head Association of North German Sugar Beet Growers (DNZ).
Upper picture: winter assemblies are gladly used by beet growers for get together and receive information.