



## NEWS FROM WABCG

### EDITORIAL

In Brazil, a new sugar campaign started this month and my colleagues in Sao Paolo are now harvesting.



Here in the USA, I am preparing for the next campaign: I have just planted my sugar beet this month, at the same time as my European colleagues.

The cycle continues: in every country, agriculture is there to remind civil society of the cycle of nature.

Whatever the rhythm of the world, we sow, cultivate and harvest at the same time of year, with the same hope for the future. Last year, the value of sugar on the world market was 20% higher than it is now - but with great fears about energy costs. The market is now hesitant and it is difficult for us farmers to predict the value our products will have in a few months' time! It is even harder to predict our income because of the effects of climate change and new pests. But we continue to do our best, trying to provide consumers with high quality products, from fields that require long-term vision and constancy to ensure sustainability!

At this time of year, when I am sowing my fields, I am always proud of my work. By repeating the same activities every year at the same time of year, by trying to make the best of our land, by acting as our parents did and as our children will do, we are part of an activity that transcends us!

I look forward to seeing you all in Fargo next month, and I wish my Brazilian friends an excellent harvest!

**David Thompson, President  
WABCG**

## MAY 2024

### NEWS FROM MEXICO

#### *Introduction*

Climate change stands as a formidable threat, disrupting the delicate balance of social, environmental, and economic systems across the globe. The sugarcane industry finds itself caught in a double bind: it contributes to this crisis while simultaneously suffering its consequences. **However, this challenge presents a unique opportunity. By implementing efficient, profitable, and resilient production processes, we can transform the sugarcane sector into a force for positive change.** This transformation will ensure the industry's continued viability, safeguarding the livelihoods of over 185,000 Mexican sugarcane producers and their families, contributing to a cleaner environment.

#### *Rainfed Production*

Mexico's sugarcane industry faces a significant challenge due to its dependence on rainfall. A staggering 60% of sugarcane fields lack any irrigation systems, leaving them vulnerable to climate fluctuations. Around 20% of the area has supplemental irrigation, while only 20% has technologically advanced irrigation systems. Droughts, heatwaves, and unpredictable rainy seasons, all hallmarks of climate change, are taking a heavy toll.



Rising input costs, especially for fertilizers, further compound the problem, leading to a decline in both sugarcane productivity and sugar content. This downward trend is reflected in the plummeting sugar production, expected to drop from 6.185 million tons in the 2021-2022 harvest season to around 4.7 million tons in the current 2023-2024 season – a 25% decrease in just two years.



### *Cloud Seeding Program*

The Northeast, Huasteca region has been hit by droughts in recent years, withstanding the worst of their devastating impact. This harvest season, the average field yield stands at a meager 48 tons/ha, while the agro-industrial yield across the region's 7 mills averages 4.6 tons of sugar/ha. An important number of growers have suffered complete crop losses, and if the drought persists, their livelihoods will continue to be severely compromised. In response to this dire situation, sugarcane producers, motivated by the UNC, A.C. - CNPR, have joined forces with the 7 operating mills in the "Huasteca" region. Together, they have partnered with Startup Renaissance, an expert company on cloud seeding, to establish an integral program, starting this month of May through the Summer month, aiming to induce rainfall whenever cloud cover permits. While this technology is not novel, its application in Mexico for the express purpose of promoting sugarcane production will be unprecedented. With high hopes for success, we look forward to sharing the findings of this pioneering venture with this innovative technology.



### *Overreliance on Nitrogen*

On the other hand, Mexico's sugarcane producers stand out for their excessive use of nitrogen fertilizer, requiring 2 to 3 times more than their counterparts in other countries to achieve the same yield. In Brazil, for instance, only 0.777 kg of N are needed to produce a

ton of sugarcane, whereas Mexican producers require 1.3 to 2.0 kg of N for the same output.

This inefficient fertilizer use significantly impacts crop profitability, competitiveness and generates negative environmental consequences. Therefore, promoting and establishing efficient fertilizer management practices is crucial to ensure the long-term sustainability and viability of sugarcane cultivation in Mexico.

### *BONSUCRO Impact Fund*

Driven by the urgency of climate change and the excessive use of nitrogen fertilizers, Biofábrica SIGLO XXI, Coca-Cola Mexico, and the UNC, A.C. – CNPR, empowered by the BONSUCRO Impact Fund, joined forces in January 2023, to launch the project "Global Warming

Reduction through Sugarcane Production in Mexico." This initiative aims to decrease the carbon footprint of sugarcane production while enhancing crop productivity, profitability, and resilience. This is achieved by using biofertilizers to reduce chemical fertilizer dependence, as a first step in the journey to establish regenerative agriculture practices. A key benefit observed from this approach is the increased production of root biomass, which leads to a higher percentage of organic matter in the soil. To disseminate knowledge and encourage adoption, workshops and field days have been organized for sugarcane





World Association of  
Beet and Cane Growers



growers. These sessions delve into soil health, the importance of organic matter and soil life, and the advantages of using biofertilizers. Additionally, growers can share their own experiences and participate in plot demonstration tours, where they can witness firsthand the impacts compared to conventionally managed plots. We are excited to share the initial findings from this project during the BONSUCRO Global Week, which will be held in Cuernavaca Morelos, Mexico, from May 20 to 23, 2024.



*I would like to give thanks to Andres Schramm for his collaboration on preparing this report. Andres is one of the Chemical Engineers who work as consultants in our organization in relation to cane quality determination and environmental issues.*



*More information on Mexico's Sugarcane can be found in our web page [www.caneros.org.mx](http://www.caneros.org.mx) and in our social networks, [Facebook](#), and [YouTube](#).*

**Carlos Blackaller, President**  
*Unión Nacional de Cañeros, A. C. – CNPR, Mexico*

#### *Harvest Season Update*

By April 13, 2024, 76.36% ha have been harvested of the estimated 747,797 ha to be harvested this season. To this date, we have a national average yield of 65.9 tons of cane/ha and a production of 6.64 tons of sugar/ha, for a total production of 3,790,254 tons of sugar.

With my best hope that this report, be of your interest and utility showing the present situation of the Mexican Sugarcane Agroindustry.

**Andres Schramm, Technical Consultant**  
*Unión Nacional de Cañeros, A. C. – CNPR, Mexico*





World Association of  
Beet and Cane Growers



## NEWS FROM BELGIUM

The 2023-2024 growing season was marked by a series of unprecedented challenges for Belgian sugar beet farmers. With an average yield of 91.6 tonnes per hectare and an average sugar content of 15.93°Bx, this season presented unexpected difficulties. Indeed, the sugar content of our beets had not reached such a low level since 1992, raising concerns among farmers.

Capricious weather conditions exacerbated the challenges.

Continuous rainfall made beet harvesting difficult and caused significant damage in the fields. Frosts in December and January also hindered the harvesting process, leaving several hundred hectares unharvested.

However, despite these obstacles, the beet price offered welcome relief to farmers, enabling them to face these challenges with some optimism.

Unfortunately, difficulties persist as we approach the 2024-2025 season. To date, only a third of the



planned area has been seeded, due to irregular rainfall. This disparity in weather conditions has created significant inequalities between fully seeded areas and those still pending.



Another major challenge facing farmers is the removal of a large quantity of active matter, raising concerns about weed control and diseases such as cercospora

leaf spot and yellows. This situation is becoming critical and requires urgent action to find sustainable solutions.

Despite these challenges, significant efforts have been made, both by factories and farmers, to prevent unharvested beets from being buried in the fields or used for biomass. This collaboration demonstrates the commitment of the entire industry to overcoming these difficulties and ensuring

a prosperous future for the sugar beet industry in Belgium.

In conclusion, **the 2023-2024 season was a challenging period for Belgian sugar beet farmers, but it also highlighted their resilience and ability to face adversity.** As we look to the future, it is imperative to collaborate closely as an association to overcome these challenges and ensure a sustainable future for our industry.

***Loïs Penasse, Executive Secretary,  
Association of the sugarbeet growers delivering the RT factory,  
Confédération des Betteraviers Belges (CBB), Belgium***





World Association of  
Beet and Cane Growers



## NEWS FROM FINLAND

As part of balancing the state budget, the Finnish government has decided to increase the VAT on sweets and chocolate products from 14% to 25.5%. Along with increasing tax revenues, it is hoped that the share of sugar products in the Finns' diet will decrease. The taxation of other products considered harmful to health, such as fats, salt or red meat, was not touched.

The purchase prices of agricultural production inputs and services have leveled off after the fall in spring 2023. However, the cost level is still 34% higher than in 2020. The price increase for energy is 69% compared to 2020, for fertilizers 36%. Uncertainty about, for example, the availability of fertilizers has eased over the past year.

In Finland, the area under sugar beet cultivation is predicted to rise steadily after the sharp drop in 2022. Last year the growing area grew by 30%, this year it is estimated that the growth is 15-20%. This is despite the disappointing fact that the sugar content of last autumn's sugar beet harvest was lower than normal, as happened in many places in Europe. The price of sugar beet remaining at a higher than usual level also for the 2024 growing season will help despite the high production costs.

This spring's sowing time threatens to be somewhat later than normal as a result of cold and rainy weather periods. After last summer's pest problems, it is hoped that a more comprehensive seed dressing will help in this matter. Pest spraying turned out to be an insufficient means of control in the high pest pressure of last summer.

The Conviso Smart method has continued to grow in popularity in Finland. Now more than half of the area is cultivated with Conviso Smart varieties. The threat of some major herbicides being removed from the range of agents will probably increase the cultivation share of Conviso Smart varieties even further in the future.

**Despite the challenges, Finnish sugar beet farmers look to the future with hope and believe in a good beet harvest.**



**Juha Wikström, President**  
*MTK's Sugar Beet Committee, Finland*



**Save the dates!**

**WABCG Council**

18-21 June 2024

Fargo, USA

*Registration is open!*

**WABCG/ISO Consultation**

25 November 2024

London, United-Kingdom