

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
LOUISIANA DIVISION**

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On behalf of the membership of the Louisiana Division of the American Society of Sugar Cane Technologists, I would like to thank the Florida Division for hosting this year's annual joint meeting at Amelia Island Plantation. I look forward to this thirty-second annual meeting being as educational and enjoyable as the previous meetings have been.

Let me begin by reviewing the 2000 crop and harvest report. The crop began with tremendous promise and the second largest acreage planted to cane in the state's history. With 491,109 acres in cane and a mild winter and spring, growers and mills were excited as well as a little nervous about the potential for a record crop. Good weather during April and May allowed quality fieldwork to be done in a timely manner and at lay-by the crop looked encouraging. Then in early June, tropical storm Allison came through dumping twelve to thirty-six inches of rain on Louisiana. Although the sugarcane crop did not experience the devastation that some row crops did, the damage to the cane crop was still significant. Many fields had standing water on them for several days and in some cases for over a week. To compound the problem, cloudy overcast skies and above normal rainfall for the remainder of the month of June placed additional stress on the crop in many areas. By late summer, most growers and mills had lowered their estimates somewhat but remained hopeful that the crop could overcome this weather related damage. However, shortly after the harvest began our fears were confirmed and our optimism over what might have been turned into disappointment. The 2001 crop would not be the record crop that the Louisiana industry had hoped it would be. The 451,820 acres harvested for sugar were only slightly less than the record acreage harvested in 2000. A yield of just over 33.1 tons of cane per acre resulted in a crop of 14,977,000 tons of cane ground. Although this was only about 88.5% of the predicted yield, this stands as the third largest cane crop ever produced in Louisiana. With a yield of 207 pounds of sugar per ton, the crop produced the second largest yield of sugar ever with 1,580,000 short tons of raw value sugar. This crop also yielded 86,368,000 gallons of 79.5 degree brix molasses. It took 117 days to grind the Louisiana crop this past year. The first mills began on September 17, 2001, and the last mill to grind finished on January 11, 2002. The closing of the Evan Hall mill after the 2000 crop left only seventeen mills in the state to grind this crop. The concerns of grinding a potential record crop with one less mill were unwarranted as ideal weather during harvest, good mill performance at most mills, and lower than expected tonnage allowed grinding to be completed earlier than expected. Most of the mills in the Bayou Lafourche and Mississippi River areas finished grinding before the end of December with a few mills in the northern and western parts of the belt running in to January.

All things considered, 2001 was a good year for the Louisiana sugar industry with many positive events taking place. The rebounding of the sugar price was one of the more significant changes of the past year. Although the increase was short-lived, the impact on last year's crop should be a little more than a one-cent per pound increase over the 2000 sugar price. Molasses prices were also up this year with an increase of about twenty cents per ton of cane. These price increases

represent a very positive economic impact on our industry. Dry weather during harvest allowed both growers and mills a chance to reduce costs and to maximize efficiency. One such example was that many mills were able to reduce or eliminate cane washing during good weather allowing more sugar recovery per ton of cane.

The Louisiana sugar industry has the opportunity to use a special harvest permit, which allows cane haulers up to 100,000 pound gross vehicle weight. This privilege means a substantial cost savings to the whole industry, and it is important that we maintain this ability in spite of opposition from other groups. In an effort to combat abuse of this privilege, the industry made the decision to self-regulate its cane hauling this past harvest. With the State Legislature passing an industry- sponsored concurrent resolution that mandates all sugar mill scales be locked out at 100,000 pounds, the incentive for overloading is removed since there is no payment for cane over the 100,000 pound level. Complaints have been greatly reduced about overloaded trucks spilling cane and tearing up the highways. A similar success has been achieved with the cane burning issue by implementing a voluntary smoke and ash management program for the 2000 crop. There are numerous environmental and public issues associated with cane burning; therefore the state and the sugar industry have implemented this program to assist growers in addressing these types of issues. The significant reduction in the number of smoke and ash related complaints this past year attest to the success of this program. In both of these cases the industry has been praised for taking positive steps to solve its own problems.

Another high point of the 2001 crop has been a record setting performance by a Louisiana mill grinding two million tons of cane in a single season. On January 8, the Enterprise mill of M.A. Patout & Son, Ltd. made Louisiana history by being the only mill in the state to ever grind two million tons of cane. Congratulations to M.A. Patout & Son, Ltd. along with all of the growers and employees of the Enterprise mill.

No agricultural industry or commodity can bank on being successful or profitable every year. There are just too many variables and no guarantees. A couple of things such as hard work, dedication, and the willingness and ability to do what it takes will certainly improve chances for success. The Louisiana sugar industry has always realized the value of this philosophy and embraced it. It is no secret that increased production and improved efficiency of our factories and our farms are the best way to combat rising costs and depressed sugar prices. Dedicated scientists doing research and developing the technologies to keep our industry competitive and progressive accomplish these objectives.

One of the most basic and important types of research work is the variety development program. This work is a cooperative effort by the USDA-ARS in Houma, the Sugar Research Station of the LSU Ag Center, and the American Sugar Cane League. Together they are responsible for the breeding, selection, and advancement of new varieties in Louisiana. The LSU Ag Center and USDA-ARS also provide valuable information to growers from research they conduct on all cultural practices from planting to harvest, crop protection, pest management, and economics. In addition, they team-up with the American Sugar Cane League and Audubon Sugar Institute to study cane quality issues affecting both growers and processors. Sugar mills in Louisiana look to Audubon Sugar Institute for new mill research along with help with processing problems and training of factory personnel. The American Sugar Cane League works with both growers and processors on

a wide variety of issues. The League handles most of the political issues and the lobbying efforts for the industry. Through its network of local, state, and national committees, the Farm Bureau often assists the sugar industry on commodity and political issues.

The information generated by the research and work of these groups is of vital importance to our industry. Various meetings, conferences, field days and our own society plays an integral part in disseminating this information. The American Society of Sugar Cane Technologists joint meeting as well as our respective division meetings provide excellent mediums for reporting results of research, new technologies, and product development.

With the invaluable assistance of these support groups and the continued hard work and dedication of the growers and processors, our industry demonstrates its willingness and ability to succeed. Because the future holds no guarantees, we are poised to face its challenges. Our most immediate challenge is to assure the industry of a favorable sugar provision in the upcoming Farm Bill. Much hard work has gone into this effort and at this time (May 1) things look favorable. The problems with Mexico over NAFTA are ongoing, but it appears that the problem with importation of stuffed molasses from Canada is heading towards a permanent resolution thanks to the work of Senator Breaux. The industry faces a constant battle to market sugar at a fair price. Will the growers and mills in Louisiana own a refinery in the future? Less mills grinding more cane means longer grindings. Our researchers are challenged to develop varieties that mature earlier and have better cold tolerance and post freeze deterioration. Can we develop a cane ripener that works quickly and has no adverse affect on subsequent stubble crops? Will an equitable cane payment formula be developed that rewards growers for delivering quality cane and rewards mills for recovering more sugar from this cane?

These and many other challenges will face our industry in the future, and we will be prepared to face them if we work together. No individual or group can do it alone. It has taken many people working together to make the Louisiana Sugar Industry the success that it is today, and it will take this continued cooperation to ensure our future.