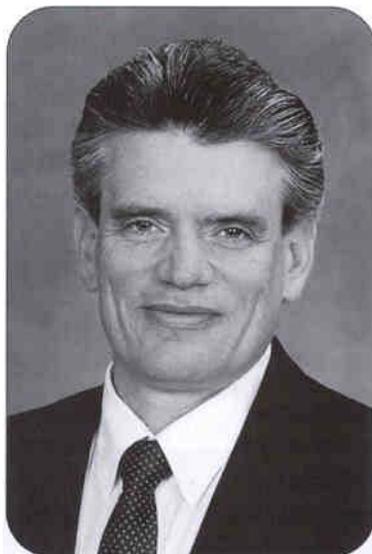


**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
LOUISIANA DIVISION
2003 ANNUAL MEETING**

Tony Parris



Welcome to the 33rd Annual Joint Meeting of the ASSCT. Welcome to our venue at the Hilton Hotel on this Northern Gulf Coast of Florida. We have chosen this site in the hope that it is easily accessible by members from both the Florida and Louisiana Divisions of our Society. Our technical program has been prepared by Dr. Bill White and we should like to thank him for accepting this role and for assembling a program which covers a wide range of agricultural topics as well as topics in manufacturing that include both chemical and engineering disciplines and one session which will be a round-table discussion on general technical developments in cane sugar manufacturing. Our keynote speaker is Dr. Andrew Schmitz and he will be telling us about some of the general issues that he believes are likely to affect US Agriculture in the near future.

As I have prepared this message for the Annual Joint Meeting of the Society, it has been interesting to reflect on the messages from some of the past presidents and some of the presentations that have been made by the members. Last year, Mr. John Fanjul talked about the vertical integration that has been taking place in the industry and the opportunities, which this can open for more technical integration between the raw and refined sugar sectors of the industry. In 2000, Dr. Bill White questioned whether the trend in our industry to become more cost effective might result in research expertise being down sized so that the industry will be forced to purchase developing technology from our competitors. He explained some of the actions which this society, a society dedicated to the advancement of the mainland sugarcane industry in the US, is taking to reverse this trend by helping to initiate a new generation of technologists by supporting

local science fairs and 4-H competitions and by supporting both undergraduate and graduate fellowships.

In my message, I should like to leave you with some vision of the future for our industry, to present some of the challenges, which our technologists and researchers might face and to report on the most recent year of operations in Louisiana. At the February 2003 meeting of the Louisiana division, Chris Mattingly expressed, in his president's address, that the 2002-2003 grinding season in Louisiana will long be remembered as one of the worst in the state's history. We suffered the effects of two storms and a substantial amount of rain throughout the crop. The production statistics for Louisiana, as compared with previous years, show an estimated decline in yield of about 1,000 lbs per acre. Sugar per ton cane is down about 15% from around 203 to 176 lbs per ton. The crop length average for all factories was increased by about 4 days to 97 days. Rainfall during the months from September to December was about 29 inches, which represented an increase over the average of the past five years of about 63%.

YEAR	UNITS	AVERAGE 1997 THROUGH 2001	ESTIMATED 2002
Area harvested for sugar	acres	423,800	447,000
Sugar 96 Pol	short tons	1,456,418	1,304,755
Sugar Yield	lbs/acre	6,873	5,838
Cane Ground	short tons	14,366,053	14,868,074
Sugar 96 Pol per ton cane	lbs/ton	203	176
Average crop length	days	93	97
Number of farms	---	690	690
Number of mills	---	17.8	16
Rainfall Sep through Dec	inch	18	29

By all measures, it was an economically disastrous year for the Louisiana industry. Not only were yields down, which results in a loss of income, but the costs of harvesting and processing the crop were also higher than normal. At the Louisiana Division meeting in February, a panel discussion was held which presented thoughts on "What Does it Cost to Harvest Under Wet Conditions". In that presentation, Dr. Ben Legendre mapped out the path of the storms, which hammered Southern Louisiana and explained how winds caused the cane to be blown over in one direction during the first storm and then in the other direction during the second storm. In that presentation, Dickie Gravois of Blackberry Farms, in Vacherie Louisiana, gave an excellent description of some of the conditions, which were experienced on the farms during this difficult harvest. Dickie's presentation was so easy to relate to, by all the growers present, that I would urge him to make his presentation again and have it recorded so that

future generations of cane farmers can better understand the immense effort which everyone involved in the Louisiana industry, including their families, had to exert to salvage what was left of the crop after the wind and the relentless rains had taken their toll.

In anticipating the future, I envisage that the trend toward fewer growers and fewer mills in Louisiana will continue. In order to process the approximately 15,000,000 tons of cane in Louisiana, it is not inconceivable that it could be processed by as few as seven sugar factories as compared with the sixteen factories in operation today. Similarly, of the approximately 500,000 acres in sugarcane, which is farmed by about 690 growers and which results in an average farm size of about 725 acres, it is not beyond imagination that the number of growers could decline to about 250, resulting in an average farm size of 2000 acres. With fewer mills and fewer growers there would be a greater potential for more unified systems of harvesting and transporting the sugarcane and handling crop data. Cane delivered to Louisiana factories is transported from distances up to 100 miles away from the factory. The most common form of transportation of this cane is by truck and trailer and even growers who are located nearer to the factories are favoring truck deliveries over tractors and wagons.

In her message as president of the Florida Division of this Society in 2002, Carmen Baez-Smith emphasized her view of the need to switch from batch to continuous production settings. The method she proposed to achieve this was by paying greater attention to automation. While automation in the industry is continuing to advance rapidly the old batch process of boiling sugar is rapidly giving way to a continuous process. Of the fifteen factories in Louisiana, which will operate for the 2003 crop, at least four factories now have continuous vacuum pans and there is the possibility of a few more being installed in the near future.

Some of the challenges which will face the industry's technologists in the near future will include; more streamlining of the harvesting and delivery systems, better collection and dissemination of data related to production and quality measurements made on delivered cane, a continuing effort to be better stewards of our environment and a continuing effort to become more efficient in processing the sugarcane into sugar.

While technical advancement of our industry is the goal of this society, its meetings, such as this one, also offer an important forum for assembling members of our industry and our corporate participants so that they may renew friendships and partake in the social events. I hope that you and your families and friends who have chosen to join us for this meeting, will feel that you have learnt what is new in the industry and will, equally as important, have had an enjoyable stay.