PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
LOUISIANA DIVISION
2004 ANNUAL MEETING

Keith P. Bischoff
LSU Agricultural Center
St. Gabriel Research Station
St. Gabriel, LA

First of all, I want to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Executive Committee and membership of the Louisiana Division of the American Society of Sugar Cane Technologists, to thank Ms. Johnson and the Florida Division for hosting this year's meeting at the Tradewinds Resort. It is always a pleasure to visit this part of Florida. It is my hope that everyone here attends the technical sessions and takes advantage of the excellent program assembled by our chairman, Dr. Ron Rice. If we can go home with just a little more knowledge than we came with, this meeting will have been successful.

As a review of the 2003 Louisiana sugarcane crop, I will refer to the final statistics as compiled by Dr. Ben Legendre. Notice, I said the 2003 crop and not the 2003-2004 crop. This was the first time in recent history that the crop was completed before the end of the year. The last mill completed grinding on December 28th.

Sugarcane was grown on 480,685 acres in 25 Louisiana parishes. This represents a decrease of 2.8 percent when compared to 2002 and the smallest acreage since the 1999 crop year, when 463,000 acres were grown. An estimated 442,230 acres were harvested for sugar, with a total production of 13,266,900 tons of sugarcane. This translates into a yield of 30.0 tons of cane per harvested acre. With the state's fifteen mills reporting an average recovery of 212 pounds of sugar per ton of cane, Louisiana's growers realized an average yield of 6,360 pounds of sugar per harvested acre. Even

though the sugarcane tonnage was lower than many expected, the 1.4 million tons of sugar ranked as the fourth largest amount ever produced in Louisiana.

Considerable rainfall occurred as the harvest season began, however, there were no tropical systems or prolonged rainy periods for much of the season like in 2002. The harvest proceeded relatively uneventful. It could be said that as difficult as 2002 was, 2003 was relatively easy. Field and factory expenses should have been significantly reduced.

The residual effects of 2002 carried over into the 2003 crop. Because of wet field conditions in 2002, many fields treated with glyphosate were harvested beyond the recommended treatment-harvest interval which, undoubtedly, affected yields in 2003. Furthermore, stubble was destroyed by poor harvesting conditions, fields were left poorly drained and rutted, and growers were unable to adequately remove the harvest residue. There was a large percentage of third-stubble and older fields. Because of marketing allotments, factories began harvesting in September, which meant that glyphosate had to be applied earlier than normal. All of these factors contributed to the decrease in tons of sugarcane per acre experienced at the beginning of the crop. In fact, early tonnages were so low that some growers reverted to harvesting with whole-stalk machines, and approximately 20 percent of the crop was harvested by this system. Thankfully, as harvest proceeded into newer stubble and plant-cane fields, tonnage began increasing.

As previously noted, sugarcane acreage was down about three percent from 2002, with one less factory operating. With trade agreements and allotments looming on the horizon, this trend is sure to continue. In spite of this, 2003 was a good year for the ASSCT. The meeting of the Louisiana Division of the ASSCT in February was well attended. There were 435 members registered, with 53 vendors having exhibit tables. The section chairmen put together programs that provided for an excellent transfer of technology.

One of the most important activities of our Society is investing in our future. In 2003, as in previous years, the Society awarded three deserving LSU students financial aid in the form of two scholarships and a fellowship totaling $4000. These students were invited to the banquet, where they were introduced to the membership and presented certificates. Members of the Society also acted as judges at the Louisiana State Science and Engineering Fair. Their charge was to identify the best sugar-related projects that touted the beneficial aspects of the crop. Checks totaling $600 were presented to junior and senior winners along with their mentors. At the annual Sugarcane Fair and Festival, $300 was distributed among junior and senior winners and their respective schools at the sugarcane judging competition.

Two ISSCT workshops were held in Louisiana in 2003. The Society provided monetary support for both the pathology and engineering workshops.

One other project that has been in the works for sometime, and hopefully will be finalized this year, is the establishment of the Denver T. Loupe Endowed Professorship at

Louisiana State University. The Louisiana Division contributed a total of $20,000, which along with a donation from Dr. Loupe and monies endowed in the LSU Foundation upon his retirement, brought the total amount to that level needed for the establishment of the professorship. This endowment will be available to a professor at LSU involved in sugar- related research.

Since beginning my career at LSU in 1977, I've been privileged to witness great advances in technology and industry. I've seen whole-stalk single-row harvesters evolve into two-row whole-stalk harvesters and now combines. Thirty-three mills ground just over 8 million tons of cane in 1977. In 2003, 15 mills ground over 13 million tons. Industry yields have steadily climbed from an average of 24.4 tons of cane per acre with 174 pounds of sugar per ton from 1977 to 1979 to more than 33 tons of cane per acre, with over 200 pounds of sugar per ton averaged over the last five years. Improved, safer pesticides, chemical ripeners, and more precise cultural practices along with greater mill capacities have enabled this industry to become one of the most efficient and productive in the world. In addition to these factors, improved sugarcane varieties and the ability of growers and processors to adapt to them had much to do with this success. Although we have made a great deal of progress over the years, it has been a long and tedious journey. During my first three years at LSU, the breeding program averaged 83,470 viable seed and 53,658 seedlings, from 147 crosses, transplanted to the field. We also averaged planting 1,849 first line trial plots and 325 second line trials. Clones in the later stages of the testing program were averaging 7,717 pounds of sugar per acre. We experienced a series of setbacks over the years due mostly to the introduction of diseases new to our industry. Rust, smut, leaf scald and newer strains of sugarcane mosaic virus all took their toll on promising new varieties. The release of LCP85-384 in 1993 presented a dilemma never before experienced. When used as a commercial check in tests, no other clones in any stage of the program at that time could compare to LCP85-384. To overcome these obstacles, we had to increase our chances of being successful. With the support of our growers through the American Sugar Cane League, we steadily increased the size of the program. Over the last three years, the LSU program has averaged 484 crosses and 455,301 viable seed with 87,817 transplanted seedlings. We have planted an average of 3,477 first line trial plots and 730 second line trials. Clones in the later stages of testing are now averaging 11,284 pounds of sugar per acre.

It has not been until last month that a variety from the LSU program has compared favorably to LCP85-384. It was announced by the Variety Release Committee that L97-128 would be available to growers for fall planting. Hopefully, this variety along with Ho95-988, which was also released last month, and HoCP96-540, released last year, will take some pressure off of LCP85-384, which in 2003 was harvested from 88 percent of the state's acreage.

Although the future of the sugar industry is somewhat uncertain, this type of situation is not unprecedented. Because of the hard work and dedication of everyone associated with sugar production, we have survived for over 200 years.

Again, I want to thank our hosts from the Florida Division of the ASSCT, and I hope everyone here takes home a little more knowledge than he or she came with.