

Some Observations on the Sugarcane Industry in Madras State

By

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I would like to extend the best wishes of the Coimbatore Institute to the success of the Sugar Industry in Madras on the occasion of the Special Number of the Madras Agricultural Journal. The research work on sugarcane in the Madras State and the welfare of its sugar industry are at the present moment under the best of auspices as the Hon'ble Minister in charge of Agriculture is no less a person than Dr. R. Nagan Gowda who was previously a distinguished member of the Indian Central Sugarcane Committee and the State Sugarcane Committee. Another unique advantage which the Madras State possesses is that the ripe counsel and unrivalled experience of Sir T. S. Venkataraman is available to it. The report of the Special Committee of which he was the Chairman, sets out in commendable detail and thoroughness the various aspects of the sugarcane industry in this State.

Though the sugar recovery in a few areas in Madras is relatively low and much development is still needed in the sugarcane crop, there is justification for taking on the whole an optimistic view of the future of the sugar industry in Madras. It is true that climatically Madras is favourably situated so far as the natural growth of the cane crop is concerned, but unless the various operations in the field and the factory are properly organized to reduce the cost of cultivation and to improve sugar recovery, sugar cannot be produced in Madras at competitive rates. There is no guarantee that the days of somewhat artificial and abnormally high price of Rs. 54/- a ton of cane will ever come again. The reduction in the price of cane is a step in the right direction and it behoves the cane grower to take a realistic view of things and to reduce the cost of production by taking the advice of the Cane Development staff at all stages from planting to harvest.

In the Planning Commission's National Plan for India due place has also been given to sugarcane in Madras and additional target for production for the five year period ending March 1956 has been fixed. This additional target has, of course, to come from existing area by way of increased acre yields and better juice quality.

Taking acre yields first, the position now is very much better as compared with the period when the older varieties were in cultivation about a decade and a half ago. The Mauritius, Java and Barbados varieties were holding the field, but suitable Coimbatore varieties became available for cultivation in 1934 soon after the work on the breeding of

canes for tropical India was taken up at the Coimbatore Institute. Co. 419 has gradually supplanted the older varieties and is now the premier variety in this State. The acre yields from this variety are very much better as compared to the older varieties and it may be said that so far as yield is concerned, the Madras State is being quite well served by Co. 419. The Sugarcane Research Stations at Anakapalle and Gudiyattam have at their disposal every year new batches of Co. canes on which they conduct detailed and careful trials. Co. 419 itself was released for cultivation as a result of such trials originally. While Co. 419 undoubtedly possesses qualities which render it eminently suited as an almost universal cane for tropical India, it would not be well to keep all the eggs in one basket and to depend on only one variety however good. The consideration of yield is important, but it need not be balanced to a nicety and at least the more progressive among the ryots should accept and grow other varieties also even if their yield is slightly less than Co. 419 provided the new varieties have the approval and backing of the Agricultural Department. The experiments at Anakapalle and Gudiyattam pointed to the usefulness of Co. 449 and Co. 467 and newer and better varieties will no doubt become available as time passes.

As for the juice quality, planned harvest would appear to be the solution though it may mean a certain amount of sacrifice on the part of ryots. There is no point in offering the plant crop of Co. 419 - which is a late ripener - in the early part of the season to the factory. If Co. 419 has necessity to be offered to the factory in the early part of season, let it at least be the ratoon crop and not the immature plant crop. The ryots near the gate areas of the factories should learn to develop liaison with the factories and adjust their time of planting and harvest as also put some portion of their land under varieties which can be crushed in the early part of the season. The position of sugar recovery in certain factories in Madras State is none too happy and though the supply of immature cane in the early part of the season may benefit certain individual ryots as the cane is sold by weight, the net result is national loss as it means less sugar recovery.

As regards recovery the sugar factories in Madras may be classified into three groups, viz., (1) those in which the recoveries are more than 10% - the factories at Seethanagaram and Bobbili fall in this category; (2) factories where the recoveries are at present low but which can easily be improved by introduction of suitable early varieties and changes in the crushing schedule. This group includes Anakapalle (Tummapala), Ettikoppaka, Samalkot, Hospet and Vuyyuru factories. And (3) factories where the position is rather serious and an improvement in sugar recoveries is a difficult problem. The factories at Nellikuppam and Pugalur fall under this last category. The recoveries of more than 10% which are being obtained at Seethanagaram and Bobbili are a result of the varietal position with suitable early, mid-season and late varieties and a

crushing schedule according to maturity of varieties. The varieties are Co. 527, Co. 421 and Co. 419. The crushing of Co. 419 is not taken up till March and in December only Co. 527 is crushed. In the second category, viz., Anakapalle (Tummapala), Ettikoppaka, Samalkot, Hospet and Vuyyuru factories where the recoveries are low there is a possibility of improvement by adoption of varieties for early, mid-season and late crushing. In the third category, viz., Nellikuppam and Pugalur, the recovery is low and improvement in sugar recovery is a difficult problem. It will need the ingenuity, co-operation and hard work on the part of all concerned.

The normal annual consumption of sugar in Madras State is about one lakh tons and the production of sugar during 1951-'52 was 99,026 tons. The total additional target in the National Plan is for 80,000 tons on the basis of gur. As the total production of gur and sugar in Madras is about five lakh tons, the additional target represents an increase of 16%. This calls for an increase of about 5 tons of cane per acre. With the Cane Development work that has now been taken in hand in the Madras State and the fairly high yields that can be achieved from the varieties that are under cultivation provided they are given the necessary conditions of cane growth, the target should be not at all difficult of achievement. As a matter of fact with proper cane development it should be easy to achieve an average of 40 tons as against 35 tons target of the National Plan and in another five year period by proper cane development an average of 45 tons may be reasonably expected.

The Cane Development work in Madras has been organised only recently and there is a special Cane Development staff in addition to the four Liaison Farms. Much hard work, however, awaits the Cane Development Department because there is scope for improvement from the time of planting to harvest with varying emphasis regarding different operations in different areas. In certain areas like the Hospet area advancement of the usual planting season by even 2 or 3 months has meant improvement in sugar recovery of the factory. In Vuyyuru tract the time of application of the manure used to be usually late. A change in the time of application to ensure that the manure is in any case applied not later than the 4th month should improve the sugar recoveries. The Cane Development staff will have to study the directions in which each area requires improvement and to effect the improvements so that the sugar recovery improves, but more than all that the cost of production is lowered. Whether it is the cane grower or the factory interest, both are merely the separate wings of one and the same industry. Given the good will, the co-operation and the organisation, the prospects of sugar industry in Madras are quite bright.