



Volume 1, Issue 4

November, 2008

*Agricultural Newsletter of the LSU AgCenter's Iberia Cooperative Extension Service*



This issue contains information regarding:

- \*Grinding Season
- \*Safety Reminders
- \*Cane Burning Reminders
- \*LSU Sugar News/Updates
- \*Farm Financial Assistance Hotline

- \*Farm Finance Meeting
- \*LSU AgCenter Personnel
- \*Wheat Update
- \*Soybean Update
- \*Other
- \*Closing



## **Grinding Season**

As we near the midpoint of the grinding season things have been dry to say the least with a fair amount of cool nights and sunny days. These weather conditions have been great for grinding, but more rain is needed for plant cane growth and better "tonnage" per acre. As expected the primary damage from Hurricane Gustav has been broken tops and lodging of sugarcane. Hurricane Ike's major damage was flooding. Soil samples were taken in early October in both Iberia and Vermilion Parish. In Iberia, Salinity levels ranged from 765 ppm to 1875 ppm; while in Vermilion the range was from 1,050 ppm to 3,060 ppm (ppm=parts per million). According to Dr. Sonny Viator, past studies and research from Rita in 2005 indicate damaging salinity levels for sugarcane start at about 1,100 ppm in the root zone. The time salt water remained on fields will also affect potential damage. After a slow start most of the mills in the area are consistently operating at a "normal" pace; however, grinding will last longer than originally expected, especially as many mills delayed their start by nearly two weeks.

## **Safety Reminders**

This time of year is busy for all farmers; especially those in the sugarcane industry. Safety is an important aspect of any industry and we must all do our part to remain safe during grinding. During harvest season some helpful hints to remember are:

## **Highway Safety**

1. Motorists should be aware and be on the lookout for large farm machinery on our highways. Farmers should make sure that all farm machinery especially lights, signals, and safety shields are working properly.
2. Farm machinery and vehicles are very slow moving and usually wider than the standard cars and trucks:
  - a) As motorists approach farm equipment on our roads they should reduce their traveling speed and make sure there is enough room to pass safely, using caution
  - b) All motorists should reduce their traveling speed as they enter a turn. Studies indicate doubling the speed of a farm tractor increases the danger of upsetting four times
3. Farm equipment operators should try to give motorists an opportunity to pass when they can safely move their equipment to the shoulder, but it is the motorist's responsibility to make sure they can pass safely.
4. Farm equipment operators must follow all rules of the road just as they were driving a car; including such things as proper lighting, signals and right of ways.
5. State law requires that Slow Moving Vehicle emblems be used both day and night on slow moving equipment using state road ways.
6. Sugarcane loading sites/areas are of major concern to motorists. Motorists should look for brightly colored road signs put out by farmers marking these areas. Sugarcane farmers should use equipment to clear road surfaces near loading sites to make them as safe as possible.
7. Make sure all drivers have been made aware of all the rules and regulations and that they all have their proper paper work.

**NOTE:** I notice a lot of drivers using cell phones while operating equipment. This not really a safe practice.

## **Power Line Safety**

Farmers should stay away from poles and power lines-cane equipment is large and can hit /shove a pole or because it is tall; power or cable lines can be pulled down by cane equipment.

If farmers are burning their fields they should avoid wooden poles and they cannot burn under or near power lines. Also smoke can envelop power lines and disrupt power. Farmers must remember buffer zones.

Some general safety measure farmers should keep in mind are:

- Maintain regular communication with the power company during any and all field work in which electrical poles or lines are a concern.
- Field areas around wooden poles should be kept free of weeds and cane should not be grown immediately adjacent to wooden poles.

- Field areas around poles and under power lines should be cut green and these fields should be burned using safe buffer zones.
- Farmers should make sure combine extractor fans do not blow green trash under or on power lines, or on electrical substations or around wooden poles. In fact extractor fans should blow in the opposite direction of these things.
- A water tank should be available in the immediate area if a field/area is being burned
- As with any sensitive area farmers should remain on site until the area and situation are declared safe.

### **Cane Burning Reminders**

The ability of farmers to burn sugarcane is a significant economic factor for the survival of the farmer and the sugarcane industry. Until proven technology allows economically efficient harvesting without burning, it is critical that growers and processors do the best job possible with regard to smoke and ash management.

The benefits of burning sugarcane are:

- An overall lower cost of production that benefits farmers and consumers
- Allows more efficient harvesting of sugarcane in the field
- Reduces the number of hauling units on the highways delivering sugarcane to the factory for processing, thus reducing wear and tear on public roads
- Decreases the volume of material to be processed by the factories
- Shortens the harvest season by as much as 10 percent
- Increases the yield of sugar recovered per ton of sugarcane by the factories and improves overall quality of the sugar produced
- Reduces wear and tear on field and factory equipment
- Reduces energy expenditures in the field and by the factory

Sugarcane producers strive to use Best Management Practices (BMP's) to manage sugarcane burning. One effective mechanism used is a prescribed burn which is defined as a controlled application of fire in a confined predetermined area to accomplish the harvest of sugarcane under specified smoke and ash management guidelines. A prescribed burn is used in sugarcane production to reduce the trash in harvested cane. This prescribed burn can occur in cut or standing cane, or in standing cane before being harvested by the combine harvester.

The recommended procedures in prescribed burning in sugarcane are:

- Step 1.** Identify areas sensitive to smoke and ash.
- Step 2.** Develop a prescribed burn plan.
- Step 3.** Obtain fire weather forecast from U.S. Weather Service.
- Step 4.** Determine smoke category day.
- Step 5.** Determine smoke and ash screening distance.
- Step 6.** Determine trajectory of smoke and ash plume.
- Step 7.** Evaluate the prescribed burn results.

**Most complaints received are when farmers burn standing cane, cane of a heap row, or residue after 4:00 p.m.** This is when a temperature inversion usually occurs, upper air temperatures prevent smoke and ash from rising, causing the smoke and ash to drift laterally impacting highways, residences and

public areas. **To reduce risk to sensitive areas, farmers should avoid burning after 4:00 p.m. When weather conditions permit, the ideal time to burn is between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.**

The following website is for the fire weather forecast in Louisiana. <http://www.losc.lsu.edu/agri.html>

Enclosed is a copy of a Prescribed Burn Worksheet that should be filled out for every burn that is done, this is in accordance to the rules for Certified Prescribed Burn Managers. Make copies of these sheets, fill them out, and keep them in a binder with you at all times. It would also be wise to print out the information from the Ag and Fire web site listed above as a precautionary measure. Each farm should have an individual who is a Certified Prescribed Burn Manager. If you are not sure of your farm's status, contact your county agent's office.

I know that all of you are responsible farmers and will head these rules to the best of your abilities. However, remember accidents such as fire jumping, ash fallout and annuitant smoke can happen. Thus, it is in your best interest to insure that you have done everything within your power to make sure it could have been prevented. So far this year all of you have done a good job in terms of burning cane and being safe on the highways and I commend your efforts.

### **Sugar News/Updates**

This fall sugar has been in the news for a variety of reasons.

1. In mid-October Imperial Sugar Company and Louisiana Sugar Refinery (LSR) which is a 50-50 joint venture company between Cargill and Sugar Growers and Refiners (SUGAR) announced it has entered into preliminary discussions to participate in the construction and operation of the new state of the art refinery in Gramercy.
2. USDA calculations for sugar loan forfeitures will basically be in the same ranges as last year. The New Farm Bill states as loan rate increases begin; forfeiture levels will rise one-quarter cent each of the next three years; granted all other factors remain the same.
3. The USDA, WASDE (World Agriculture Supply and Demand Estimates) report states that caution is advised before making end of the year adjustments as the threat of raw cane sugar loan forfeitures has worsened and that a great deal of uncertainty remains with regard to United States and Mexican sugar production. At this time it seems waiting until April 1 to make major import decisions would be sound advice.
4. The bill proposed in late September on Capitol Hill to provide assistance to producers affected by natural disasters in 2008 failed. Now that elections are over, congress will return to Washington for a "lame duck" session with retiring and defeated members casting votes which could mean an extremely unpredictable session. A new president and congress will begin to make policies in 2009.
5. The Sugar Bulletin is always an excellent source of information and LSU AgCenter economist; Dr. Michael Salassi has great advice in the November 2008 issue entitled "*Negotiating Sugarcane Land Rents.*"

6. The Iberia Research Station in Jeanerette has developed an online newsletter entitled “*Iberia Research Station News*” available at the following address:  
[www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our\\_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR)

#### **Farm Financial Assistance Hotline**

The LSU Ag Center has established a hotline for agricultural producers who are facing financial hardships. Enclosed is a green colored paper with details. All calls and information will remain confidential.

#### **Farm Finance Meeting**

The LSU Ag Center and your local county agent would like to look at ways we can help producers in the long-term process of trying to overcome the impacts and financial stress caused by the hurricanes of 2008. One of the first steps is to get Agri-businesses (lenders, suppliers, mills, etc.) to meet with producers to open lines of communication so that possible strategies can be developed. We would like to bring these types of people to the table in order to assist in the recovery process. LSU Ag Center agents would like to invite producers, and agri-business to meetings in December to deal with and identify these financial issues. Your input is appreciated. **Please contact the county agent’s office by Friday, November 28<sup>th</sup>** so that arrangements can be made. Once details have been finalized, a separate letter will be sent to each of you.

#### **Ag Center Personnel**

Two outstanding sugarcane scientists with the LSU Ag Center have decided to retire. Effective October 1<sup>st</sup>, Dr. Ben Legendre is the head of the Audubon Sugar Institute. He will remain interim State Sugarcane Specialist until his replacement is named. Interviews are scheduled for December. Dr. Keith Bischoff; sugarcane scientist (breeding program) at the Sugar Research Station in St. Gabriel, will retire in the next few months. Applications are now being accepted for Dr. Bischoff’s replacement. Both will be missed and we wish them the best.

#### **Wheat Update**

Wheat production is on the mind of many producers. Enclosed is the 2008-2009 LSU AgCenter Wheat Production Guidelines (developed by Dr. Twidwell & Dr. Harrison). Also enclosed is the LSU AgCenter Wheat Situation and Outlook developed by Dr. Kurt Guidry. Dr. Guidry has also developed an Excel Spreadsheet that contains a 2008-2009 projected budget for wheat production. The LSU AgCenter has also developed a document entitled “Strategies for Managing Weeds in Wheat “ which is enclosed as well.

#### **Soybean Update**

The planting of soybeans for 2009 is probably not on many producer’s minds right now, but will be soon. The results of the 2008 Iberia/St. Mary soybean test plot have been posted on the internet at the following web site [www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our\\_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR) When reviewing this information, please keep in mind that this data is from 1 field on 1 farm. Also note that the plot contained both group 3 and group 4 beans. The entire plot was harvested on August 28, 2008 ( 2 days prior to Hurricane Gustav) so some of the group 4 beans were harvested a little early and the harvesting moisture was a little high ranging from 13.6% to 22%. Bushels per acre ranged from a low of 55.5 to a high of 75.0. Special thanks to Blanchard Brother’s farms for their cooperation. The November issue of the LSU AgCenter Soybean and Feed Grain Review is available online at [www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our\\_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/parishes/iberia/Features/ANR)

**Educational Tour**

An educational tour to Mexico to meet with Mexican sugar producers, mills, and others in the industry is currently in the works. Tentative plans are to fly to Mexico for 4-5 days and nights during the first part of February, 2009. Your input is appreciated. Once arrangements have been finalized, they will be sent to you.

**Other**

During the month of December we will begin to plan our January/February producers meetings. Advisory committee members and other key industry leaders will be contacted to assist in planning these events. Also acquiring email address's for all producers remain a high priority. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Each Headland Highlight is available on the internet which allows you to link to many valuable online resources. The web address is:

[http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our\\_offices/parishes/Iberia/Features/ANR/Headlandhighlights](http://www.lsuagcenter.com/en/our_offices/parishes/Iberia/Features/ANR/Headlandhighlights)

**Closing**

With the Holiday season just around the corner and grinding in full swing, I wish each of you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. 2008 will most likely be remembered as the year of what could have been had it not been for Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. My hope is that we learn from years like 2008 so that we can be best prepared for future events. As always, please remember that we at the LSU AgCenter are here to help. If you need us in any way, we are only a phone call or computer click away, so do not hesitate to contact your county agent's office.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,

*Blair Hebert*

Blair J Hebert  
County Agent  
Iberia/Vermilion Parish

BJH/rv  
Enclosures

