



World Association of
Beet and Cane Growers



NEWS FROM WABCG

JANUARY 2025

EDITORIAL

This is a precious time to look back on the year that has passed and to look forward with optimism to the year to come!

The image I will keep of 2024 is that of our meeting in Fargo: the whole WABCG family came to my home and enjoyed being



together, exchanging views on agriculture, comparing practices and discussing solutions.

Hopes and friendships are always here when we meet every year - and that is so precious

right now! For my part, they are strong engines to motivate me in my daily work!

2025 will be a new year for our Association, which will elect a new President and Board of Directors at our meeting next June. It will take place in Cairns, Australia, thanks to the invitation of our Canegrowers colleagues, 18 years after our last meeting on that continent! I look forward to seeing all of you there!

I wish you all, your families, friends and colleagues, an excellent 2025!

**David Thompson, President
WABCG**





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NEWS FROM FRANCE

In France, the 2024-2025 campaign is almost finished, with an average yield of around 79t/ha. Yields were again heterogeneous, with the northern part of the country penalised by unfavourable weather conditions throughout the campaign, with late sowing and little sunshine during growth, preventing the beet from gaining in sugar content and many foliage diseases.

With this new disappointing yield, growers are anticipating the 2025 sowings, which will take place from March, with the Olympic average yield falling below 80t/ha for the first time since 2007. The facts are stark: in ten years this average has fallen by almost 10t/ha!

There are at least three possible explanations for this decline. Climate change is one: the last few years have seen an alternation between too much and too little rain - and we have collectively failed to anticipate the need to better manage water resources in our beet growing areas.

But this decline can also be explained by the fact that French growers have fewer and fewer pesticides to protect their beet. This is not just a European issue linked to the Green Deal, which aims to reduce the use of chemical pesticides. It's also a French problem: we have our own legislation that prevents us from using products used elsewhere in the EU (such as acetamiprid, which is used to control aphids).

Finally, the choice of varieties has also shifted towards this type of low-input agriculture. Our varieties are more resistant to disease, but less productive as a result.

The problem for growers is that, at the same time, our production costs per hectare continue to rise. Next year too, beet growers will have to spend around €3,000 per hectare of beet. Thus, to stay in the race, French beet growers need a guarantee that the market will be able to pay beet prices above €37.50 per tonne.

And the CGB will fight to ensure that this is possible, because it is in France that the bill for the end of quotas is the most bitter: we have already



closed five factories (i.e. 1 out of 5) and lost market shares in our own EU territory. Indeed, our area has gone back to what it was under quota, while other beet-producing countries have increased it - sometimes by more than 40%!

To preserve the beet markets, we must first focus on our sugar market. It's a mature market and volumes are falling. If we don't, our factories will have to close - and the European Union already allows more than 2 million tonnes of sugar to be imported every year.

Sugar beet growers therefore have no choice but to fight to limit the impact of the concessions made to sugar in the free trade agreements, for example by adopting mirror measures to guarantee the same means of production for all. They also have no choice but to limit any new concessions, for example with Mercosur (and I'm sure our Brazilian colleagues understand this), and to reverse the offers made to Ukraine to help this country at war on Europe's doorstep.

And Europe is not alone: the European market reacts to the volatility of world markets. Let's face it: our high production costs mean that we cannot survive when prices fall. Faced with this situation, eight years after the end of sugar quotas, it is time for the European Commission to recognise that we need to return to a certain management of the sugar market, as all



Photo Rémi Venot, CGB



the rest of the world does. The first step would be to agree on the concept of crisis, and the CGB is working on this: the Commission's reference threshold price of 404 €/t has not changed for 15 years!

Many models around the world show that we can manage the market without cost for taxpayer: the American model ('sugar to ethanol' programme, for example) or the Brazilian model (promotion of ethanol through the *Renovabio* programme).

In this respect, biofuels are an essential element in the sustainability of our industries, and I am bitterly disappointed to see that EU policy has consisted solely of facilitating imports, without providing any visibility to encourage investment.

In the face of the often short-term visions of political decision-makers, farmers have a role play to remind society of the importance of the long term. In any case, this will be the CGB's work programme for the coming year: Happy New Year to all!

Guillaume Gandon, Vice-President
CGB (Confédération Générale des Planteurs de Betteraves),
France



Photo Jean-Jacques Fatou, CGB

NEWS FROM DENMARK

The 2024 sugar beet season in Denmark started later than normal with an average sowing date around the 2nd - 3rd of May – almost one month later than normal. The first beet was planted in the last part of March but continues rain during the month of April left only a few days suitable for planting until we reached the first part of May, where we finally got a good period and finished sowing.

Some fields planted in April were as well damage by rain shortly after sowing, so the expectations were for



a long time a yield up to 10 % below average. But sugar beet is an incredible crop with a long growing season and good weather conditions in the late summer and autumn means that we now expect a result close to our 5-years average.

Our campaign started with the first beet in the middle of September, and we expect the campaign to end in the last part of January. Our two factories in Denmark are owned by Nordic Sugar (Nordzucker) and both factories have basically performed well during the campaign. The temperature has been mild until now and it looks like we avoid difficulties with frost and rotten beets this year – something that created a lot of problems a year ago in the 2023-campaign.

Nothing is perfect, and as mentioned during our WABCG-meeting in London we have huge problems with a new sampling system, which our processor installed at the factories before the campaign. The former Cocksedge system was replaced by a Rupro sampling system.

The new system was not working well in the first part of the campaign, so the growers were missing a lot of samples from their loads. We have afterwards



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reached an agreement how to compensate for the missing samples.

The second problem is that the measured dirt content with the new system is too low compared to the delivered clean loads. We are still in process to find a solution to that part.

Both factories have this year been converted into use of gas instead of heavy fuel oil. This has been possible as the existing pipeline for natural gas in Denmark has been extended to the two large islands in the south part of Denmark where the two sugar factories are situated.

The conversion into gas means a lower CO₂ emission from the factories, and it is the first step towards fulfilling the target for 2030. Denmark has a political agreement to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 70 % in 2030 compared to the level in 1990.

Second step for the factories is within a few years to change a large part of the gas from natural gas to biogas. It will give the remaining reduction in the CO₂ emission and the sugar factories will reach the 70 % target.

The beet pulp is an essential element in that puzzle. **The processor, Nordic Sugar, has made an agreement with the owner of some biogas plants in the area to sell pulp to the plants and receive biogas in return. The beet pulp belongs to us, the growers, so we have at the same time made an agreement with Nordic Sugar, that they can sell a part of the pulp to the biogas plants.** We have already for many years had an agreement with Nordic Sugar about the price for the pulp used for cattle feed. It is important that there still is enough beet pulp for use for feed stuff, but a part of the pulp will in the future be used for biogas.

The agreement between us and Nordic Sugar about the pulp for biogas includes an extra payment to the growers if the market price for natural gas exceeds a certain level.

**Troels FRANSEN, President
Danske Sukkerroedrykere (Danish Beet Growers)
Denmark**



The two sugar factories in Denmark have this year been converted into use of gas instead of heavy fuel oil (picture of the factory in Nykøbing). A large part of the natural gas will within a few years be replaced by biogas, so the sugar factories will fulfil the target and Danish political agreement to reduce the emission of greenhouse gasses by 70 % in 2030 compared to the level in 1990.