

SA Sugar Industry Agronomists' Association

The South African Sugar Industry Agronomists' Association (SASIAA) promotes the development and application of the science of sugarcane agronomy in South Africa. This is achieved through the creation of opportunities for the free exchange of relevant ideas, knowledge and information between members. The Association is also responsible for receiving and distributing field trial reports from other Agronomic Institutions – thus promoting information sharing and cooperation.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSOCIATION IS IN THE REGION OF 150 MEMBERS. MOST MEMBERS HAVE AN AGRONOMIC BACKGROUND AND HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN SUGARCANE AGRONOMIC RESEARCH. MEMBERSHIP EXTENDS TO INDIVIDUALS ATTACHED TO RESEARCH INSTITUTES AND SUGAR ESTATES OPERATING IN SOUTH AFRICA, EG. SASRI AND NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES SUCH AS SWAZILAND, ZIMBABWE AND MALAWI. GENERAL MEETINGS IN THE FORM OF AN ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM ARE HELD ANNUALLY AND FIELD EXCURSIONS ARE ARRANGED WHEN APPROPRIATE. THE SYMPOSIA ARE HUGE IMPORTANT FOR NETWORKING, SHARING INFORMATION ON CURRENT AGRONOMIC PRACTICES AND FOR DISCUSSING INDUSTRY CHALLENGES.

The 2010 symposium was held at SASA during October. The theme was "Sugarcane Agronomy and the Environment" – a topical and appropriate theme for our current situation. The symposium included a range of speakers who presented on various aspects of agronomy and the environment.

These topics included a talk by Graeme Leslie, Principal Entomologist at SASRI on the stewardship of agrochemicals (which included the correct storage and disposal) and the importance of proper record keeping. Graeme also highlighted the importance of the environment and some of the challenges associated with agrochemicals such as product withdrawals and pest resistance.

Vaughan Koopman from the Mondi Wetlands Programme and Kevin McCann, Regional Manager at the KZN-Wildlife Stewardship Programme highlighted the benefits of biodiversity to people and the environment. Some of the financial benefits include rebates and incentives. Vaughan also spoke about the non-financial benefits such as wetland rehabilitation and management. Environmental benefits include: securing key habitats and types of vegetation and better management of the natural environment.

The day progressed with more interesting and informative talks with a presentation by Geoff Maher, SASRI Extension Manager on the sugarcane farm management system known as SuSFarm. Geoff shed some



Above: The SASIAA symposium is an opportunity for members to network and exchange information.

light on the positive effects of integrating plant and animal biodiversity in farming and the farmer and farm worker as being integral components in the production system.

Isobel van der Stoep, Technical Executive Officer at SABI, focussed on irrigation efficiency highlighting factors such as sound design principles, quality manufactured components and regular evaluations to assess performance and detect problems.


Explaining non-point source pollution from sugarcane cropping systems was SASRI's System Modeller, Michael van der Laan. Some conclusions were that sugarcane farming has a significant ecological footprint, and that there was a need to imple-

ment better management practices. He also emphasised the importance of wetlands and buffer strips.

Des Conlong, SASRI Senior Entomologist, talked about area-wide integrated pest management and weed biocontrol and SASRI's initiatives in the fight against insect pests and weeds. His presentation was illustrated with colourful pictures of the success achieved by using biocontrol agents in the effective management of habitats.

The day's proceedings concluded with a talk by Paul Russell, General Manager of Tongaat-Hulett Sugar Agricultural Operations who discussed the importance of an effective safety, health and environment management system, and ensur-

ing that proper measures are in place to eliminate and reduce risk and costs in operations as well as improve labour relations.

Rowan Stranack, SASIAA Chairman was formally acknowledged by the delegates for arranging and giving direction to these annual symposia. They commented that the talks were highly informative while being quite diverse and thought-provoking. 

Mirash Royan
Publications Officer
South African Sugarcane Research Institute
South African Sugar Association

