



# SUSFARMS®

## The Sugar Industry's Sustainability Compass!

*In 1998, some 16 years ago, Noodsberg Cane Growers (NCG) sought to develop an environmental management system that would improve the standard of sugarcane farming in the region.*

The first version of the system was completed in 2002, and in 2004, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), Mondi Wetlands Project and the Noodsberg Cane Growers formed a partnership to develop the system further and to make it more practical. A pilot project was initiated, working with the NCG, to build a credible working example of integrating environmental management into cane farming that was practical, workable, sustainable and acceptable to all growers, environmentalists and legislators. The purpose of the project was to identify the most significant environmental impacts of sugarcane production in South Africa and to assess how well Noodsberg Cane Grower guidelines addressed the environmental impacts identified. With the input of an environmental legal expert and government regulators, the team assessed how comprehensively the guidelines addressed the industry's legal obligations with respect to land and water resource use and the resultant Sustainable Sugarcane Farm Management System, known as SUSFARMS® was born!

### EVOLUTION OF THE SYSTEM

Over the past decade, SUSFARMS® has continued to evolve – mainly driven by the Noodsberg stakeholders.

However, its relevance to the entire industry has been widely accepted and there is now a renewed adoption of the system as a valuable tool to promote best practice as well as legal compliance and to demonstrate progress towards sustainable production.

### THE EVOLUTION OF SUSFARMS®

**1998:** Noodsberg Canegrowers realised the need to improve environmental standards of sugarcane farming, and subsequently started the development of an Environmental Management System (EMS).

**2002:** The 'System for Environmental Management in Sugarcane' (SEMIS) was completed.

**2004:** WWF partnered with Noodsberg to support the development of a more practical system. This partnership led to the development of SuSFarMS™.

**2012:** SASRI initiated a legislation update and simplified the system before launching the 2nd edition of SUSFARMS®.







### WHAT IS SUSFARMS®?

SUSFARMS® is a tool that facilitates the production of sugarcane in a profitable, sustainable and environmentally responsible manner. It consists of a comprehensive collection of better management practices (BMPs) related to sugarcane farming, and distinguishes between practices that are either legal requirements (laid out in the law) or best practices derived from scientific studies.

#### WHAT ARE BETTER MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPs)?

These are practices that are introduced to reduce environmental impacts, provide economic benefits as well as address the needs of labour and local communities, while all the while ensuring the long-term sustainability of the sugarcane farm.

BMPs are based on knowledge derived from scientific studies, or in the absence of such data, best available knowledge.

The SUSFARMS® system also includes an assessment tool known as a Progress Tracker. This allows a grower to determine his/her current performance against a set of measures and offers advice on how to improve the situation. The results of a completed assessment allows the grower to highlight his/her strengths and weaknesses and to develop a plan to correct any

obvious deficiencies. Implementation of the system by the grower should result in improved performance in the environmental, social and economic spheres.

The results of the Progress Tracker may also provide the local sugarcane Extension Specialist with information that will guide the development of a focussed programme of work, direct new technology development and promote adoption of better practices.

### MARKET PRESSURE

There is a growing trend internationally for customers to question the methods used to produce raw materials and the assessment mechanisms developed to verify the sustainability of production of the raw material. Questions are being asked about food safety and quality – how does the sugarcane producer reduce the food safety risk regarding the use of pesticides, herbicides and other agrochemicals? How does the sugarcane producer reduce the quality risk regarding non-sucrose and potential contaminants such as dextran and colour? Ethics and social responsibility are also being questioned – is child labour being used and are the mechanisms for sustainability being verified? There is now a need to formalise the ability to prove to the customer that meaningful and effective assessments of the production process are taking place. This too can be demonstrated through the preparation of a Progress Tracker assessment.

## MARKET ACCESS

In recent years many multinational companies have made bold commitments to sustainability, with sustainability standards or certification schemes seen as a crucial tool for achieving those commitments. Some of the major purchasers of sugar have identified specific sustainability targets, as indicated in the diagram below.



SUSFARMS® is therefore an imperative of the South African sugar industry and can be used to provide end-users with a high level of assurance of the sustainable practices being implemented on the farm. While many different standards and certification schemes exist, SUSFARMS® has been recognised as a local system that does not conflict with or contradict other standards.

## SUSFARMS® IS AN ENABLER

SUSFARMS® is here to assist and protect our sugarcane growers - enabling them to be legally compliant, protecting the environment and ensuring sustainable business.

Since SUSFARMS® includes many of the environmental, social and financial best management practices that growers have already been implementing on their farms, it is not new. SUSFARMS® simply packages these BMPs in a fashion that helps the sugarcane farmer to implement them, monitor progress and provide evidence of compliance to legal and recommended standards. The system and the associated assessment are neither a criticism of management-style, nor a competition between growers. It is a journey of continual self-improvement while assisting in demonstrating to our major consumers our commitment to sustainable sugar production.



Michelle Binedell  
Knowledge Manager  
South African Sugarcane  
Research Institute

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26 Nagington Road, Wadeville, Germiston, 1400. P.O. Box 14733, Wadeville 1422, South Africa  
Tel: +27 11 824 4810, Fax: +27 11 824 2770, e-mail: dave@matherandplatt.com www.matherandplatt.com

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