

# SUGAR INDUSTRY SUPPORTS SMALL-SCALE FARMERS

Michelle Binedell and Thulani Masondo

A partnership between government and the sugar industry is bearing fruit.

The Extension Venture Agreement (EVA) between the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, KwaZulu-Natal and the South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI) is an effective and unique relationship between government and the private sector. This formal relationship aims to support small-scale and land reform sugarcane farmers through the provision of a well-trained and supportive advisory network of extension specialists.

Together, these individuals prepare an annual programme of work according to the strategic needs of the area. They provide appropriate sugarcane technology and information

to farmers when required, identify small-scale and land reform sugarcane grower research needs, and ensure that the sugarcane extension specialists are properly qualified, trained and experienced.

Each year, the partnership works together to deliver a series of modular training courses to farmers in all sugarcane growing areas in KZN. This year, the turn-out has been phenomenal with over 190 farmers attending the recent course in the Umfolozi area. Farmers are knowledge-hungry, keen to learn all they can to improve yields and manage their crops.



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## Tips for growers:

The effects of the recent drought have been felt across the sugar industry in South Africa. Reduced yields and the consequent loss in income means that farmers must do all they can to efficiently and effectively plan and cost their operations to ensure quick and effective recovery. There are a number of good practices that should be followed to assist in this regard:

**Soil health and nutrition** – Nutrient analysis through a reputable soil testing laboratory such as SASRI's Fertiliser Advisory Service (FAS) is money well-spent as farmers will know exact nutrient requirements for each field (especially nitrogen after a drought). Plan a sampling programme to commence as each field is harvested.

**Seedcane** – Long-term forward planning is key to ensuring a supply of good quality seedcane. Plan to long-fallow (minimum of 9 months) seedcane nursery fields on your farm for planting next year with a supply of Certified Seedcane available from your Local Pest Disease and Variety Control Committees' seedcane scheme.

**Planting** – It may not be possible to replant all the fields needing to be reestablished after the drought, therefore fields should be prioritized based on their likely contribution to cash flow in the coming year (e.g. high potential fields).

**Land Use Planning** – Conservation structures, particularly waterways, should be repaired before the spring rains. Waterways should be grassed and cared for to ensure rapid and extensive ground cover.

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**FAS**

Fertiliser Advisory Service

## Promoting Optimum Yields

SASRI's Fertiliser Advisory Service has been making it possible for farmers to take the guesswork out of sugarcane nutrition. Today we offer a comprehensive range of analytical packages, not only for sugarcane, but for other agricultural crops as well.

**SASRI**  
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