

# BRIDGING SEEDCANE GAP FOR SMALL-SCALE GROWERS

Bongiwe Chonco

Accessing good quality seedcane has proven to be a challenge, especially for small-scale growers. To try and bridge the seedcane gap, demonstration plots have proven to be a good tool for providing not only good quality seedcane but also for introducing new sugarcane varieties while providing training to the rural communities.



The aim of a demonstration plot is to enable a small-scale grower to have access to a field school in their local area which exposes them to cane husbandry and at the same time exposing a grower to different varieties while promoting new varieties from SASRI.

Seeing that seedcane is vital for the success and sustainability of the sugar industry, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has provided financial assistance to assist with producing good quality seedcane. Implementation is being done through the Extension Venture Agreement (EVA) which is between the South African Sugarcane Research Institute (SASRI) and DARD. Though the seedcane programme was approved in June 2014, implementation only commenced last year (2017).

A demonstration plot planted at Malangeni (Umgwempisi) under Sezela that belongs to Gogo Dyna Luthuli is one of many that have been planted throughout KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of a demonstration plot is to enable a small-scale grower to have access to a field school in their local area which exposes them to cane husbandry and at the same time exposing a grower to different varieties while promoting new varieties from SASRI. Requirements for a demo plot is for the co-operator to sell seedcane locally to the members of the cooperative at an affordable price which is agreed upon by the members of the cooperative.

FIELD'S DAY PROGRAMME FOR 2017-2018	
Month	Activity / Subject for Training & Demonstration
July	Soil Potential, Environment & Soil Sampling
August	Seedcane & Varieties
September	Land preparation
October	Planting & Fertiliser Application
November	Herbicide Application
December	Hand Weeding
January	Top Dressing
February	Cane Estimates
March	Cane Quality
April	Cane Harvesting
May	Cane Payment
June	P&D Inspections

The process or cycle of a demonstration plot kickstarts around July when a co-operator is being identified in conjunction with an agricultural advisor and other industry stakeholders.

Each operation has a planned field day where growers come and learn about the particular operation taking place which is in the form of classroom/presentation style rather than an actual physical demonstration and doing the actual operation which enables a grower to have both theoretical and practical know-how of that operation. Most of the growers in the area hire contractors to do operations on their plots, the training they receive allows them to obtain the skill of knowing when and how an operation should be done so that they can identify when things are not going well.

South Coast experienced seedcane shortage and as a result had to source seedcane from the Sezela Transplant Nursery which resulted in speedlings being planted in Umzimkhulu and Sezela which was nearly five times more compared to stick seedcane budget.



Weather has also played a major role. Due to the dry periods experienced, especially in January-February, there were delays in planting of the demo plot. This plot was planned to be planted in December last year but due to the rains experienced mid-December it was too wet so it ended up being planted in January this year which has yielded good results.

ALLOCATION PER MILL AREA FOR 2017/2018 SEASON		
Mill Area	Total Planned (ha)	Planted (ha)
Umzimkulu	6	4.25
Sezela	6	5.19
Eston	4	4
Noordsburg	4	4
Maidstone	14	2.3
Gledouw	8	7.2
Darnall	0	0
Amatikulu	18	12
Felixton	27	22
Umfolozzi	3	3.26
Makhathini Flats	8	7
Pongola	8	0
	<b>109</b>	<b>71.2</b>

Demonstration plots assist in ensuring that a small-scale grower has clean certified seedcane in their local area at an affordable price as well as with good record keeping of all the plots seedcane sources can be traced as per Industry's Vision 2023 of seedcane. And above all a grower is capacitated with the know-how of farming sugarcane while being left with good quality cane to use as commercial cane when handed over after cutting seedcane.

*Bongiwe Chonco is an Extension Specialist at SASRI.*

- Top: Land preparation done in Dec 2017.*
- Second: Planted Jan 2018, good germination and weed control took place in March.*
- Third: Chonco at her recent P&D field day (showing growers off-types of N12 in the N58 plot, already picked up by P&D team through the line by line seedcane inspection).*
- Bottom: Current status as at end of May 2018.*

# OUTDOOR GYM FOR MTUBATUBA COMMUNITY

Priya Seetal

The sugarcane areas of Mtubatuba in the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast now boasts the third outdoor gym sponsored by the South African Sugar Association (SASA).

The outdoor gym was launched in May in collaboration with the KwaZulu-Natal MEC for health, Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo. Dr Dhlomo thanked SASA for the outdoor gym, especially for its commitment to erecting gyms in areas that often lack such facilities. The gym promotes physical activity which is essential to stay healthy and to treat and prevent obesity and non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

**The gym promotes physical activity which is essential to stay healthy.**

Makhosazana Themba, Health District Director for the Umkhanyakude District, where the gym is located, said the community was over the moon. "As the community of Nkundusi, we appreciate SASA for having employed our fathers and grandfathers. As a result we are where we are because of that as we were able to go to school and get educated and today we are working. During those days, SASA was the main employing body, more over this gesture is good and appreciated as returning the tax that was paid by our fathers and grandfathers to benefit us – as this generation," she said.

*Priya Seetal is Nutrition Manager at SASA*

*Right: Health MEC Sibongiseni Dhlomo cutting the ribbon to mark the official opening of the outdoor gym.*

*Above: The excited community members are already utilising the gym facilities.*

