

Need For Research-Even Processing Research

While this column, regardless of the author, often talks about the need for agricultural research, sugarbeet or sugarcane processing issues are normally only seen in other columns in *Sugar Journal*. However, there are a number of reasons why sugarcane growers should be interested in processing matters, just as sugarcane processors should be interested in agricultural research.

In today's world, financial resources available for research are usually difficult to find in many industries. As a result, research objectives are usually prioritized. Sugarcane growers and agricultural scientists are primarily interested in variety, fertilizer, cultural practices, pest control and other issues that directly affect the production of sugarcane. Sugarcane processors have another list of priorities. When money is short, not all of either group is generally funded.

So why would growers want to see processing research rather than projects that would directly affect agricultural production. For one thing, growing sugarcane does little good if processing it into sugar is not as efficient a process as possible. And, of course, the reverse is also true. New practices that improve the profitability of sugarcane processing could be extremely important to the grower. For sugarcane farmers that own the factory, they get a double payoff from processing research. For those that simply deliver their cane to a privately owned factory, a more efficient processing operation means that more of the sugar in the growers' cane supply can be recovered and paid for.

Agricultural research generally comes from a local university, federal experiment station or in some cases from private sources. Where does processing research come from? In older days, a number of sugar companies had their own processing research. Unfortunately, many processing research facilities no longer have the research program they used to conduct and some have even ceased operations. Many of those have ceased operations or have been greatly curtailed. Remaining are only a few facilities that conduct research dealing with processing issues. Here in Louisiana, it is fortunate that there are two facilities that conduct processing related research. Audubon Sugar Institute in Baton Rouge has the mission to foster a center of excellence for applied and original sugar research, which exceeds the expectations of our stakeholders in Louisiana and the international sugar industry, through innovative research, technology transfer and education. Research conducted at Audubon has focused on optimization of sugar processing to enable sugar factories to become more efficient. Grants from the American Sugar Cane League (representing the Louisiana

sugar industry) and the Louisiana Board of Regents have primarily made this research possible.

Sugar Processing Research Institute, Inc (SPRI) is located in New Orleans, and is a private, non-profit group. It is a unique organization conducting research on both sugarcane and sugarbeet issues for the international sugar industry. Its mission states that SPRI shall devote its best effort in accordance with the accepted highest professional standards to be a center of excellence in sugar technology for the global sugar industry and to serve the interests of its members. The goals include: to devote its best effort to be a center of excellence in sugar technology for the sugar industry; to serve its members on process and analytical method development and improvement for increased productivity with the emphasis on cost reduction, automation, increased yield and product quality assurance; to develop innovative processes or technologies to meet energy and environmental needs for sugar production via original research; to promote the professional interests of its members by dissemination of scientific and technical information on sugar and sugar-related products manufacturing; to provide/meet educational and training needs in sugar technology for the sugar industry. SPRI wishes to serve its members by ensuring there is return on their investment. Current efforts work toward the principal that money invested in the research program will provide results that are beneficial to the member. Communication between the staff and members is an important aspect of solving the challenges that face all industries. SPRI is an organization that is responsive to its member's needs.

Much of the work of SPRI deals with analytical tests, sugar quality issues such as color and degradation products, and topics that deal with alternate products, energy and ethanol issues. SPRI is located within the USDA facility in New Orleans which allows for interaction with numerous scientists that deal with quality aspects of sugar. SPRI's research program is set by a special research committee along with its board of directors to include projects that affect both cane and beet industries. Processing research at SPRI is important to the future of the international sugar industry for both growers and processors. Along with other organizations around the world that conduct processing research, SPRI performs an important role in solving the processing challenges of the future and leading its member companies toward economic efficiency.

Additional information on SPRI can be obtained at www.spriinc.org