Historic dates of the sugar agroindustry in Colombia

Cane in Colombia and in the Cauca River Valley

Sugarcane was brought to Cali by Sebastián de Belalcázar (1540), who planted it on his country estate in Yumbo. From there the crop spread throughout the Cauca River watershed. Earlier in 1538, Pedro de Heredia introduced sugarcane to Colombia via the city of Cartagena.

According to Víctor Manuel Patiño in his book *Historic Sketch on Sugarcane*, “Sugarcane came to Colombia in the year 1538 via the port of Cartagena, and two years later (1540) it entered the geographic valley of the Cauca River via Buenaventura, being planted initially on the left bank of the Cauca River in Arroyohondo and Cañas Gordas, places very close to Cali, where panela-producing cane mills operated.” According to Patiño, the penetration of cane into the rest of the country was done from María La Baja in Bolívar; Valley de Apulo, Rionegro and Guaduas in Cundinamarca; Valley de Tensa in Boyacá; and Vélez in Santander.

The first large growers

According to the same author, “In the mid-XVI century, the systematic cultivation of sugarcane was begun. Pedro de Atienza, a resolute Spaniard, was the first industrialist. The miraculous grass had been transported from the Great Canaries to Santo Domingo in special nurseries built in the bilge of the caravels. On the island, it was established with an irresistible genetic furor. Those first cane fields were the grandfathers of those that today present their arms to the winds throughout the Tropics. Pedro de Atienza was the first witness to an agricultural miracle when he proved that this grass produced year around in the Valley, without having to limit it to the periodic milling seasons. With that argument it appears that he convinced the farmers who did not want to stop planting maize, cacao, plantains or raising cattle.”

According to Patiño, “the Basque Gregorio de Astigarreta did not ‘beat about the bush’ either. At the end of the XVI century, he bought rustic plantations along the Amaime River; and with impressive intuition, planted them with sugarcane. From Spain he brought Juan Francisco, Pedro Miranda and Rafael Guerra, who appear to have been cane growers in Granada and the Canary Islands, to manage these rustic plantations. Little by little, the patch of the sugarcane fields was extended all over the plains.”

Around 1560 three sugar mills were founded along the banks of the Amaime River: San Jerónimo, belonging to Gregorio de Astigarreta, and the other two belonging to Andrés and Lázaro Cobo. There was also a mill in Caloto, property of Francisco de Canarías, to manage these rustic plantations. From that same year (1855), the use of boilers and cane mills expanded into Carare and Tequendama.

Imported varieties

The landraces that the Spanish introduced at the end of the colonial period reached the Guayanas; Tahiti or "Oathiti" was later introduced to the Valley between 1802 and 1808. When in 1801 Alexander Von Humboldt passed through Cali, he recommended the estate owners to plant Oathiti cane, which had recently been imported by Francisco José Arboleda in Japio; by Manuel de Caicedo Tenorio in Cañasgordas; and by Miguel Cabal and José María Lozano Peralta on their sugar estates in Llano de Buga. Oathiti spread through the grasslands of both banks of the Cauca River. However, don Manuel de Caicedo maintained the ancient landrace until he could confirm whether the exotic one was just furor and robustness.

From the artisan milling to large machinery

During the colonial period, the production of panela, sugar and molasses was an artisanal task and remained so until the beginning of the XX century, when a modern plant was inaugurated in the Manuela Mill. The first cane fields were not very extensive as there were very few inhabitants. Neither was milling done daily as there was little demand for sugar and molasses. The cane mills were rudimentary with two wooden feeding rollers: some were horizontal, moved manually by a crank with X bracing; others were vertical, hauled by an animal. It was not until 1867, when the demand increased, that the Manuela Mill set up a mill with three horizontal iron feeding rollers driven by water, a bronze still and a rectifier for aguardiente. Years earlier, in 1855, the sugar mill of San Pedro Alejandrino and near Ciénaga Grande, used steam engines. In that same year (1855), the use of boilers and cane mills expanded into Carare and Tequendama.

In 1883 the manufacture of cane mills in iron began in an ironmonger’s shop in Pacho, and in 1892 spun or centrifugal sugar was produced in the Berasqui Mill in Ciénaga de Oro.

In the Manuela Mill, steam engines were inaugurated in 1901, with a cane conveyor, sulfur tower, filter press, evaporators, vacuum pan and centrifuge.

Since 1909, the Colombian nation turned over the privilege of the alcohol and liquor production monopoly to the provinces.
Law 4 of 1913 gave the provincial Congresses the attribution to monopolize production, introduce and sell distilled, intoxicating liquors. The official production of aguardiente was not installed immediately in the Cauca Valley; it was subcontracted to private distilleries.

**The arrival of the railroad in the Cauca Valley**
Railway expansion was a key factor in the agrarian development of the Cauca Valley. Since colonial times the trade was done by mule trains and by rivers. In 1915 the railroad reached Cali from Buenaventura; in 1917 it was extended to Palmira, after which it advanced rapidly toward Cartago and Popayán. The Central Highway was also extended throughout the prairie. The exchange of merchandise, the mobilization of people and with it the transculturation of traditions and customs were catalyzed. The different circuits were interlinked, together with a growing exporter vocation to other markets for the region, which had begun toward the end of the XIX century with exports of coffee and the domestic trade of tobacco to Antioquia.

**Expansion of the industry in the Cauca Valley**
By 1920 bread sugar and panela were produced with modern machinery in Palmira (San José and Santa Gertrudis sugar estates); in Pradera (El Arado and Corozal); in La Florida (La Industria and Perodías); in Corinto (La Elvira, Mendiola and La Siberia); in Caloto (Japio); and in Guachinte (El Nilo).

In 1930 there were only three sugar mills in the Cauca Valley: Manuelita, Providencia and Riopaila. Since that time the sugar industry began to expand until there were 22 sugar mills in the region. From 1920-1930 the sugar mills Sautatá, Cachipay, San Antonio, Mave, Payande and Consacá, Bomboná, Chalguayaco, Ortega and Salinas were established.

From 1930-1933 the variety POJ 2878 arrived. Today it is still planted in a large part of all the cane-growing zones of Colombia by recommendation of the Chardón Mission from Puerto Rico. Around 1935, sugarcane mosaic wiped out the cane fields in Antioquia and descended on the Cauca Valley. Fortunately POJ 2878 was already being planted. This crisis indicated the need to strengthen the research on sugarcane in order to advance with certainty and firmness toward an agroindustry. The variety Otañí was replaced by POJ 2878 and POJ 2714.

From 1930-1939 the sugar mills Bengala, Perodías, La Industria, Marí Luisa and Mayagüez appeared. From 1940-1942 the Sancarlos, Pichichi, Oriente, Papayal, La Esperanza, El Arado, Central Castilla, Carmelita, El Porvenir, Meléndez, San Fernando and Central del Tolima came into existence.

After 1940 the sugar mills began to disappear from regions other than the Cauca Valley, and mechanization of the Cauca Valley agroindustry was consolidated. Little by little, the importations of sugar were reduced.

**Asocaña, Cenicaña and other new entities in the sector**
By 1957 the sugar industry required an association that would act as a spokesman for all the sugar mills, given that they had the same interests, traded the same products and were located in the same geographic zone. That concern planted the seed for ASOCAÑA, which was born a year and a half later, on 12 February 1959 with legal capacity granted by the Ministry of Justice (Resolution 0845 of 14 March 1959).

From 1950-1959 the sugar mills Sicarare, El Naranjo, Santa Cruz, Cauca, Central Tumaco, Balsilia, La Cabaña, La Quinta and Buchiloto appeared on the scene. The biological control of cane pests was introduced.

From 1960-1969 there was great growth in the sugar section. COLMIELES began activities as an exporter of sugars and molasses; its name changed to CIAMSA. In 1961 Colombia became a member of the World Sugar Organization. PAGRACO, known today as PROMAL, began activities.

CENICAÑA was constituted in 1977 as a private, nonprofit corporation of indefinite duration, scientific and technological in nature, with headquarters in Palmira. In the same year the Colombian Association of Cane Technicians (TECNICAÑA) was founded. In 1978 the Risaralda Mill began activities.

**Events, achievements and investment**
From 1980-1993 planting of the variety Mayagüez 74-275 spread. The commercial evaluation of promising varieties of CENICAÑA began. There was a display of social action in the region in recreation, health, education and culture. Environmental programs were intensified.

The XXII World Congress of the ISSCT (International Society of Sugarcane Technicians) met in Colombia in 1995. In 1996 the agreement for clean production was signed with the Ministry of the Environment.

As of 1999 the variety CENICAÑA Colombia (CC) 85-92 became the first commercial variety in the area planted by the Colombian sugar industry in the Cauca River Valley. In the year 2000 the fund for stabilization of sugar prices was created, and in 2002 the automated meteorological network was consolidated throughout the Cauca Valley.

From 1995-2005 the agrosugar industry invested more than US$120 million in the environmental area, which was reflected in lower levels of contamination per unit of production per year. The environmental management of the sector was recognized at the national level with first place in the "National Blue Planet Prize of Ecology 2002-2003: Business Category," granted by the Occidente Bank. The sugar mills (through ASOCAÑA) received this prize for water management and conservation in the sugar sector, a vital resource not only for the sector’s activity but also for the region in general.

In 2006-2007 the cane growers of the geographic valley of the Cauca River were given the results of a detailed study of soils that CENICAÑA conducted in cooperation with the sugar mills and the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute (IGAC).

In the first quarter of 2007, the Colombian agrosugar industry implemented the Network for Monitoring Particulate Matter (PM10), formed by five automatic stations, distributed in the area of influence of the crop in the Cauca River Valley.
**Fuel alcohol**
The Mayagüez, Providencia, Incauca, Risaralda and Manuelita sugar mills established distilleries to produce ethanol at the end of 2005 in response to Law 693 of 2001, which mandated oxygenating vehicular gasoline with 10% (in volume) fuel alcohol produced from biomass.

SOURCE: ASOCAÑA – TECNICAÑA - FEDEPANELA