Inaugurating the webinar, Smt. Reeta Harish Thakkar IAS, Commissioner of Sugar, Government of Tamil Nadu and Managing Director, Tamil Nadu Sugar Corporation, said that this webinar is a welcome initiative from ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute. Since the day lockdown was announced in March, many sugar factories in the state have been operating with only 30-40% of capacity utilization. The Government of Tamil Nadu has been taking several steps to revive the sugar sector such as providing transport subsidy @ Rs.100/ton of cane, disbursement of NADP subsidy amount and extending the production subsidy and micro-irrigation scheme under PMKSY (Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana) for 2020-21 as well.

Dr Bakshi Ram, Director of ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute in his opening remarks remarked that both the sugarcane farmers and the sugar mills have been suffering during the COVID-19 crisis. Mentioning that this webinar has been structured in such a way that the sharing of knowledge would help in overcoming the post pandemic challenges; he informed that the webinar was being held to cover the following topics:

- Challenges of Human Resource Management in Sugarcane Agriculture and Sugar Industry: Issues such as manpower requirements for cane cultivation...
and for a sugar factory, decreasing trend of agricultural labour availability, challenges of agricultural workforce during COVID-19, inter-state movement of farm labour, risk mitigation strategies and modification of the work-flow process to suit the present conditions were emphasized.

- **Sugarcane agriculture: Combating challenges in the post-COVID-19 scenario** – Assumptions pertaining to the post COVID-19 scenario, Short-term and long-term impacts and mitigation strategies at the research and extension levels were discussed.

- **Responding to mechanization challenges in the post-pandemic period**: Issues such as acute scarcity of farm labour, escalating cane harvest charges, reduction in cost of cultivation due to mechanization, merits of wider row spacing, varietal preferences, weed management, intercropping issues, custom-hiring of implements and promoting entrepreneur models were highlighted.

- **Sugar market: Challenges and responses post-COVID-19**: Global, National and state-level sugar production, sugar consumption pattern, Revenue sharing formula Vs Fair and remunerative price and impact of COVID-19 on the sugar market were discussed.

- **Challenges and opportunities for Micro-irrigation in sugarcane**: Issues such as improving cane yield and quality in micro-irrigated plots, persisting lack of adoption among farmers, assistance from the government-side, lack of awareness on irrigation scheduling and problems in system maintenance were shared.

- **Emerging sugarcane pests and diseases**: Solutions for Pokkah boeng disease and for pests in sugarcane such as leaf mite, mealy bug and white grub were discussed.

The distinguished speakers at the webinar were Shri M Silvester, Kothari Sugars and Chemicals Ltd., Shri S.J. Lakshman, EID Parry (I) Ltd., Shri K Nagendran, Sugarcane specialist, Shri R Varadarajan, Rajshree Sugars & Chemicals Ltd., Shri N Sezhian, Jain Irrigation Systems Ltd. and Dr R Viswanathan, ICAR-Sugarcane Breeding Institute.

Over 660 participants from 19 states of the country and 5 foreign countries had registered and participated. The webinar was held for over five hours and was moderated by Dr D Puthira Prathap, Principal Scientist of ICAR-SBI.

The final event of the webinar was the Q&A session. Over 100 questions on the post COVID-19 issues pertaining to the sugarcane sector were posed by the participants out of which a few were answered by each speakers during the session. A compilation of the complete Q&As would be compiled for wider distribution among the participants.

While proposing a vote of thanks from the industry side to the Institute, Shri S.J. Lakshman appreciated the efforts of the ICAR-SBI in proving solutions to various problems faced by the industry and the farmers. He specially mentioned about the two recent initiatives of the institute viz. quality seed production under farmers participatory programme and releasing the short duration sugarcane variety Co 11015, which will help the sugar industry in the long run.

**DIRECTOR, ICAR-SUGARCANE BREEDING INSTITUTE**