UP sugar output hits all-time record

Achievement, a result of the spread of a high-yielding, early-maturing wonder variety

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The Rural

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THE STORY of sugar in the 2016-17 season (October-September) has been about two unusual years. One is the drought in Maharashtra — one of the major sugar producing states — that brought cane availability for the new season. The Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), on September 28, projected the state’s sugar output for 2016-17 at 2.56 million tonnes (mt). Actual production turned out to be just 1.47 mt, a steep drop over the 4.83 mt and 3.79 mt in the preceding two seasons, and the lowest since the 2.31 mt of 2004-05.

The second unusual season has been well-reported (see Bade Prajapati’s story). Although ISMA had revised its estimates in September-21 Downgraded estimates had pegged sugar production this season at 7.06 mt, up from 6.96 mt in 2016-17, as on April 14. West Bengal had already produced 857,276 t. With 225 out of 450 factories working, the final output could touch 8.10 mt — an all-time high, surpassing the previous 2006-07 record of 8.04 mt.

Not surprisingly, the above production achievement hasn’t come due to any increase in sugar area. UP’s total area under cane in 2016-17 was, in effect, only a quarter compared to 2006-07. Nor has it been through high yields. Yields in 2016-17 were about 89 t per ha, compared to 115 t per ha in 2006-07. The higher output by mills is mainly because of rising sugarcane production bringing sugar output up by 8.5% to 2016-17 from 18.1% in the previous season. That, in turn, is due to the spread of Co 0238, a cane variety which gives both higher yields to farmers and also more sugar from each tonne crushed by mills.

From practical zero till 2012-13, Co 0238 has emerged to have covered 7.29 lakh hectares (8%) or 35.5% of UP’s total sugar area this season. “Given the higher yields from this variety, its share in overall production and cane crushed by mills will probably exceed 80%, predicts Vinay Kumar, managing director, sugarcane development and sugar industry commissioning of UP. Sugars, as early asvt 60 quintals per ha per 2012-13, it is now 55 quintals (80 tonnes per hectare).”

Farmers with 20-25 t of sugarcane stalks of Co 0238 variety at a field in Bijnor, UP. (Photo: Ashish Pandey)

Farmers with 20-25 t of sugarcane stalks of Co 0238 variety at a field in Bijnor, UP. (Photo: Ashish Pandey)

The success of this variety over the last five years is due to a combination of high yields and better sugar recovery. Co 0238 is a variety with a higher sugar content of 14.3% and a lower juice brix (10.15%) compared to other varieties, which are usually 20% and 11.8%, respectively. The higher sugar content of Co 0238 translates to higher sugar recovery, which in turn is a major factor in the higher output.

The benefits from farmers who are farm-sugar mills is that this variety has a higher sugar content, and the higher sugar recovery translates to a higher sugar output. The higher sugar recovery also results in a higher sugar output for the same amount of cane crushed by mills, which in turn translates to a higher output for the season as a whole. The higher sugar recovery also results in a higher sugar output for the same amount of cane crushed by mills, which in turn translates to a higher output for the season as a whole.