

# The Better Sugarcane Initiative

**Managing social and environmental risks is important for sugarcane growers, processors and food companies due to regulatory pressures as well as shareholder and consumer expectations for sustainably-produced goods. Additionally with prices of petroleum rising, ethanol from sugarcane is a growing market. To date many industries have been unable to extend their social and environmental corporate profile to the way in which sugarcane is cultivated and processed; while many national or local producer groups have high social and environmental production standards, there is not an international set of sustainable-sugar standards by which industries, companies and investors can define their sugar purchasing principles.**

## **What is the Better Sugarcane Initiative?**

The Better Sugarcane Initiative (BSI) is a collaboration of progressive sugarcane retailers, investors, traders, producers and NGOs who are committed to developing internationally-applicable baselines that define sustainable sugar cane.

**What are the social and environmental impacts of sugarcane?** Sugarcane is a water intensive crop which remains in the soil all year round using some 7,000-45,000 litres of water per hectare. It is frequently grown on steep hillsides without terracing, resulting in the loss of topsoil from the farm and a high sediment load in rivers and estuaries.



From a social perspective, jobs in sugarcane production are among the most hazardous in the agricultural industry and in some cases cane cultivation wages do not provide enough food to cover the calories burned on the job. These are some of the social and environmental issues the Initiative will seek to address.

**What does the BSI intend to do about these impacts?** The end result of BSI will be a set of standards which can be used by companies and investors across the globe as sourcing and investment screens and by producers to enhance the long-term sustainability of production.

**Why sugarcane?** While sources of sugar include beet, differences in production and processing practices for beet and cane would necessitate different standards. BSI is focused on sugarcane due to its global prevalence; sugarcane is grown in 103 countries and accounts for 60-70% of sugar production, a figure which is expected to grow as the EU Sugar Regime is reformed and biofuels become prominent on the global market.



The BSI aims to:

- **Determine the principles of Better Sugarcane** – BSI recognises the wide range of issues connected with sugarcane cultivation and will focus on a few significant social and environmental issues such as soil productivity; rational water use; effluent management; biodiversity maintenance; and equitable labour
- **Define globally applicable performance-based standards for sugarcane** that take into account local conditions and circumstances – BSI recognises that the impacts of sugarcane farming will vary between farms and regions and seeks to underpin standards developed at the national or regional level
- **Promote the implementation of sustainable sugar** to reduce social and environmental impacts whilst maintaining or enhancing the economic status of farmers – BSI understands that governments and industries do not wish to have more standards unless there are clear benefits for farmers
- **Enable sugarcane buyers to obtain sugar that has been produced according to agreed, transparent and verifiable criteria** – BSI is focused on the bulk of sugar production, and does not intend to create a niche product

## Technical Working Groups

To achieve these objectives the BSI is establishing Technical Working Groups (TWGs) – teams of technical and scientific experts – with global representation. These TWGs will assess Better Management Practices being used by sugar growers across the globe under three categories:

1. Environment and agronomy
2. Social and community
3. Milling and co-products

Based on good practice achievements around the world, the TWGs will develop a set of universally-applicable standards for consideration by the BSI membership. The standards will follow the Quadruple Bottom Line approach which seeks to:

- Minimise the effects of sugarcane cultivation and processing on the off-site environment
- Maintain the value and quality of resources used for production, such as soil health and water
- Ensure production is profitable
- Ensure that production takes place in a socially equitable environment.

Standards requiring further consideration will be tested in different cane-growing scenarios around the world to ensure that they are practical and achievable, and have the desired effect of improving the economic, environmental and social sustainability of sugarcane farming.



## Operation and governance

The BSI is made up of a Secretariat, a Steering Committee, Members and Supporters.

- The **Secretariat** coordinates the BSI liaising closely with the chair of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is comprised of Jason Clay (environment NGO); Olivier Genevieve (social NGO); Rob Horner (finance sector); Michelle Lapinski (corporate responsibility NGO); Hari Morar (miller/refiner); Robert Quirk (sugarcane grower).
- The **Steering Committee** guides BSI taking decisions pertaining to process. The chair of the Steering Committee is a sugarcane farmer in New South Wales, Australia.
- **Members** have a varying level of involvement in BSI but at the least meet once a year at a BSI forum.
- **Supporters** do not join BSI but officially support the process.

BSI seeks to be an open, inclusive and collaborative process committed to engaging stakeholders in a constructive dialogue to define, develop and encourage the implementation of Better Sugarcane. The BSI is open to all participants who subscribe to the mission and objectives of the initiative.



## Get Involved

There are a number of ways to get involved in BSI:

- Steer BSI taking executive decisions on all matters pertaining to the structure and process of BSI: become a member of the Steering Committee (\$25,000 per annum with voting rights. Acceptance will be determined by existing members of the Steering Committee)
- Attend the BSI forum and vote: become a member of BSI (\$2,000 per annum with voting rights)
- Be more involved than a member but without being on the Steering Committee: become a Special Advisor to the BSI and input to a particular area of interest such as one of the Technical Working Groups (\$8-12,000 per annum with voting rights)
- Provide technical or scientific expertise: become a member of one of the Technical Working Groups (No charge. Acceptance will be determined by TWG members and the Steering Committee)
- Support BSI: declare your support to BSI without joining the forum (No charge and no voting rights)

The fee structure will remain as indicated until the end of 2007, at which time the structure will be reviewed. In-kind contributions are considered for each tier of membership.

## More information

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[www.panda.org/agriculture/bettersugarcane](http://www.panda.org/agriculture/bettersugarcane)