

Farming mechanisation helps to boost sugar production

The impressive growth of Thailand's KTIS Group has been made possible by investment in modern machinery, including Case IH sugarcane harvesters.

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Sugar production is one of Thailand's great commercial success stories. In the global league of sugar exporters, Thailand is second only to Brazil. One of the largest sugar processing factories in the world is located in Nakhon Sawan Province, 200 kilometres north of Bangkok. Kaset Thai International Sugar Corp (KTIS), a leader in sugar and derivative industries, owns this factory as well as two others, and has continually increased output to meet growing demand, expanding production capacity from 11,500 to 88,000 tons per day. To keep up with this almost eight-fold increase, KTIS' sugarcane farmers have replaced labour-intensive processes with mechanisation, and productivity has been boosted by one machine in particular: the Case IH Austoft® A8000 sugarcane harvester.

KTIS now knows from first-hand experience that Austoft 8000 Series harvesters are the most advanced, productive, and reliable on the market, but when the company first considered purchasing a harvester it agonised over the decision. For the machine to pay for itself, KTIS calculated that it would need to process 300 tons of cane billet per day. Because one manual labourer can harvest one ton of cane per day, or two tons if the cane is made easier to harvest by burning, the mechanical harvester would have to equal the work of 150 to 300 labourers.

If such high productivity seemed unlikely, KTIS' doubts were quickly dispelled. The company's first harvesters, bought second-hand from Australia, met and surpassed all targets. Now that KTIS operates Case IH harvesters, purchased new from Case IH's regional distribution centre in Bangkok, harvesting productivity is even better. The tight deadlines imposed by the harvesting season, which lasts only about 130 days, have become easier to meet. And crop-burning during harvesting – which damages the soil's biodiversity, causes air pollution, and contributes to global warming – has already been dramatically reduced.

Of all the harvesters available, the Case IH Austoft 8000 Series meets the most demanding performance and productivity needs. Designed to harvest fields with single rows with 1.5-metre spacing or double rows, the Austoft 8000 Series is ideal for large-scale operations. In ideal conditions, it is capable of harvesting up to 100 tons per hour.



PRESS RELEASE

The Austoft 8000's exceptional performance and reliability are due to a combination of factors: the powerful 353 horsepower engine; Smart Cruise technology which automatically adjusts engine RPM, placing less stress on the hydraulic system and reducing fuel consumption by up to 0.7 litres per tonne of cane billet; 45-degree crop dividers with outer spirals; an Antivortex cleaning system in the primary extractor; a high chopper speed of 205 RPM; and large dimensions for the chopper, base-cutter discs and feed rollers.

Harvesting efficiency is further enhanced by another feature of the Cruise Control, which automatically controls and memorises ground speed, and an integrated Auto Tracker which automatically controls base-cutter depth, ensuring a precise and uniform base-cut with minimum cane loss. This reduces stool root damage by an average of 27%, reduces root ripping at row-ends by 28%, and reduces overall cane losses by 63%.

Impressive commercial growth with environmental responsibility

KTIS Group has grown to a scale that is impressive by any international standard. In Nakhon Sawan Province the company's Ruamphol sugar factory has increased capacity from 500 to 15,000 tons per day; in Uttaradit Province, KTIS's Thai Eakaluck factory has expanded capacity from 6000 to 18,000 tons per day; and in Kanchanaburi Province the company's Rhuampol factory started with a capacity of 5000 tons per day, relocated to a larger site in Nakhon Sawan to enable expansion to 12,000 tons per day, and has since attained capacity of 55,000 tons per day. To feed these factories with raw materials, KTIS now operates 120 sugarcane harvesters - and more than half of those are from Case IH.

KTIS's Chief Executive Officer, Parphan Siriviriyakul, commented: *"Case IH harvesters are high-quality, easy to manage and easy to maintain. It is also reassuring to know that the after-sales service is very good. There is a dedicated, expert harvester team, and if parts are ever needed they are made available quickly. Case IH's management team are 'all ears' and we like that."*

To support the Thai users of harvesters and other agricultural equipment, last year Case IH opened a new distribution centre in Bangkok. This guarantees direct access to spare parts distribution, service and expert technical advice. As well as recognising the importance of the Thai domestic market, this initiative is part of Case IH's strategy to make Thailand the Southeast Asian regional centre of excellence for sugarcane harvesting machinery.

Excellence, too, is a KTIS hallmark. The Group also owns and runs three power plants, with one located next to each of its sugar factories. Between them these generate 160 megawatts, enough to power all three factories and be sold to the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand and Provincial Electricity Authority of Thailand. Another KTIS Group company, 'KTIS Bio Ethanol', produces 230,000 litres of ethanol daily, and uses waste from the ethanol to make the biogas which fuels boilers in the sugar factories. Good use is also made of the waste from sugar production, which is mixed with nutrients to make organic fertiliser as well as paper and pulp from sugarcane bagasse which help the environment by reducing plants cutting up to 32 million units yearly while also getting Food Grade Products.

All of these interconnecting processes, Mr Prapan says, result in "zero waste." This, like the Case IH sugarcane harvesters, demonstrates how modern technologies can be good for business and good for the environment.

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