

isn't damaged. The fire reduces the weight of the material being harvested as well as the amount of plant material run through the crushing and refining process.

As it is, the fibrous plant material left after the cane is crushed and processed—known as bagasse—is used as fuel to operate the refinery.

Near the end of the day, Rifa is showing me the fields where they grow seedstock sugar cane for the years to come. Researchers at the University of Florida and the USDA help the company and others test new varieties of cane that might require less water and are known to be disease-free.

"I'll harvest sections of this plot and move them to different parts of the operation and plant as seed," says Rifa. "One acre of seed plants produces about 8 acres of sugar cane. I want to build up enough of the seedstock so I can expand it, so I always have disease-free cane."

Asked if he ever gets lost among the 38,000 acres he supervises, Rifa laughs and says, "No. Believe it or not, when you deal with this every day, I even know the varieties in the fields by memory."

We believe him. **FL**

VISIT THE CANE FIELDS. Watch the video at myFarmLife.com/sugar.



NONSTOP FLEET



BETWEEN U.S. SUGAR AND GLADES PLANTING LLC, the South Florida operations this past year used no fewer than 52 tractors from AGCO to help put sweetener on tables worldwide. Between last October into this coming April, U.S. Sugar leased 20 MF7622s that will haul heavy wagons loaded with sugar cane from the fields to rail car elevator collections points.

"Those tractors work 24 hours per day," says Juan Cervera, U.S. Sugar's harvest operations manager. "One harvest crew comes on at 4 a.m. to 4 p.m., then a second crew from 4 p.m. to 4 a.m. They are hauling an average of 4,500 tons of cane per day."

"When you look at our operation, we put 3,500 hours on a tractor in a season," says Heather Banky, managing director of grower relations, fleet & special projects. "You don't see that happen in three or four years in other businesses."

"Juan even manages the fuel usage," says Banky. "You can save money without spending a dime just by being smart with managing machinery. They've done a real good job with that." This year, all the tractors were equipped with AGCO's AgCommand® monitoring system, which will increase their ability to monitor performance, including fuel usage.

U.S. Sugar is on its second year using the MF7622. The reviews are glowing. "They pull really well," says Cervera. "They pull better than the John Deeres of the same size. The operators like them. They are comfortable." (In part because of their size, U.S. Sugar uses equipment from several farm equipment brands.)

Glades Planting contracts with U.S. Sugar to plant cane, spray crop-protection chemicals and apply fertilizer. In 2015 they leased eight MF5612s, eight MF5613s, and 16 Challenger® MT465B tractors. Like U.S. Sugar, they leased the machinery from Kelly Tractor in Clewiston.

"The biggest thing is to be able to support the tractor," says Trey Dyess, co-owner of Glade Planting. "And we have to say Kelly Tractor does a really good job." Dyess and partners also own two of AGCO's RoGator® sprayers, an RG1100 and an RG900.

"We get 32 tractors from them. We're the biggest ag rental for Kelly Tractor," says Dyess. "As long as they do good service work, we'll stay with them."

U.S. Sugar depends on Kelly as well and, as with Glades, the commitment from Kelly Tractor is solid. "They have to be running all the time," says Clayton Jones of Kelly Tractor. "Any downtime is expensive. They depend on our parts department, and we stay pretty stocked up. We are on call 24 hours per day."