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Editorial

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BIO-ORGANIC FERTILIZERS, ANYONE?

In these times of rising petroleum prices, everything else's prices go skyrocketing. For the industry's cane and sugar producer, this is a source of grave concern; after all, significant chunks of its production cost are petroleum-based. For the cane grower, this refers to diesel fuel for the tractors working in the fields, and for transport of materials in and out of the farm, as well as for hauling canes for delivery to the mill; more importantly, this also pertains to inorganic fertilizer, the major source of the cane's nourishment.

On occasions like these, our thoughts can't help but wander on the worth of **bio-organic fertilizers**.

The farm and the factory are rich sources of wastes and leftovers which could very well serve as raw materials for the production of bio-organic fertilizers. Excess bagasse, mill ash, and filter cake (mudpress) are abundant in the factory, while crop residues abound in the fields. All it will take is to gather all these materials, dedicate an area where this could be processed, adopt a readily available technology and microorganism, a couple of dedicated staff to manage and operate the composting project, ample gestation period, and *presto*, bio-organic fertilizer!

Then again, all of these are easier said than done; however, it has been demonstrated, and accomplished—there are just so many success stories over these ventures to substantiate the claims. SRA, before the restructuring, boasts of a By-Products Department where Bio-Organic Fertilizer (BOF) production technologies were developed and transferred to several sugar milling districts. At one time, there were around eight (8) BOF centers operating all over sugarlandia.

There are some issues that one must remember and consider about organic fertilizer, however. One is that they are not meant to fully replace the inorganics, that is, they can only replace part of them. There are just some stages in the growth of the sugar cane plant that require much more amount of nutrients than what bio-organic fertilizers can offer. Another one is that the replacement of inorganic with organic fertilizer cannot be done fast enough, say one- or two-time substitution; this must be phased-in meticulously into your operations (There are cane growers who, because of the attractiveness of organic farming, may suppose that they can immediately change into organic agriculture next cropping season; even if no inorganic fertilizers are applied, the residuals of the previous application usually stay in the soil for several years before they are finally exhausted) . Bio-organic fertilizers, no matter what your dealer tells you, contain just small amounts of the NPK nutrients compared to the commercial fertilizers now in use. And, mind the prices offered—you might be duped into believing that organic fertilizers cost much, much lower than the commercial ones. Have your friendly SRA extension guy evaluate this for you.

Organic fertilizers must be appreciated not entirely for their nutrient content, but for other values not found in inorganic fertilizers—soil improvement as its *tilth*, or soil workability, micro-nutrients, pH effect, and safety to soil even if constantly applied over long periods. The use must, again, be consulted with SRA or Philsurin technical people in your districts.