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# Sugar Industry in the South

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bales of cotton and 757 million bushels of soybeans. In 2004 soybean production still surpassed cotton production in these states but had declined to 571 million bushels. A quiet revolution brought about by a single new crop had changed the face of the South.

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### **Sugar Industry**

Cane sugar is a key commodity in international trade and an important component of the modern diet. At one time or another, sugarcane was grown commercially in Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. During the 19th century, south Louisiana was the focal point of this dynamic industry; beginning in the mid-20th century, however, the center of innovative activities shifted to Florida.

Between 1880 and 1910, the Louisiana sugar industry experienced a scientific and technological revolution in methods, process apparatus, and scale of operation. The animal-powered mills and open evaporation kettles characteristic of the antebellum period were supplanted by large, technically designed, and scientifically controlled central factories. One commentator of the period, Mark Twain, described the modern sugar factory as "a wilderness of tubs and tanks and vats and filters, pumps, pipes, and machinery." This new industrial world, which emerged in rural Louisiana, was brought about in large

part by a variety of local institutions working in alliance with certain agencies of the federal government. They included the Louisiana Sugar Planters' Association (LSPA), the Louisiana Sugar Experiment Station, the Audubon Sugar School, Louisiana State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). These institutions facilitated the introduction of a progressive chemical and engineering technology, derived in part from the European beet-sugar industry, into this traditional plantation culture of the Deep South.

Of these local organizations, the LSPA made the crucial contribution to this transformation in manufacturing. Established in 1877 and led by many of the wealthiest and most politically powerful sugar planters in Louisiana, the LSPA systematically developed connections with federal government officials, practical engineers, and academic scientists to gain its organizational objectives. The late 19th-century modernization of the Louisiana sugar industry took place within an international context. Louisiana sugar planters, confronted with competition for the European beet-sugar manufacturers, responded not only to an economic challenge, but also to a scientific and technological one. They met this foreign threat by creating local institutions for coordinating planters' activities, conducting research, and supplying the scientific and technical expertise necessary for the modernization of their industry.

The technologically dynamic nature of this industry was largely confined to the milling and processing end of the business until the late 19th and early

20th centuries. Field operations, while totally restructured in terms of labor relations after the Civil War, remained traditional in practice, with arrangements forged by a complex set of negotiations between planters and field hands. And while improvements in agricultural implements, including the steam plow and later the tractor, would be gradually introduced into Louisiana cane fields by the early 20th century, mechanical harvesters were not used on an extensive scale until the 1980s.

As a result of changes in national party policies concerning the sugar tariff and the concurrent emergence of sugar-producing areas in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Java, the Louisiana sugar industry entered into a period of decline after 1900. Subsequently, a number of sugar planters and investors channeled their energies and capital into south Florida, where they attempted to apply the practices of the Louisiana industry to the completely different environment found in the Everglades. The economic feasibility of the Florida industry became a reality only after USDA scientists at Canal Point, Fla., and research scientists for the United States Sugar Corporation discovered new varieties of cane, established specific fertilizer requirements, and introduced cultivation techniques appropriate for the region's unique soil, drainage, and climatic conditions. By 1940 Florida's sugarcane industry surpassed Louisiana's not only in terms of yield, but also in quality of raw sugar produced.

The Florida and Louisiana sugar industries supply only a fraction of the sugar consumed in the United States

today. However, they continue to have a significant impact upon their respective local and regional economies.

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Louis Ferleger, *Agricultural History* (April 1998); John A. Heitmann, *Florida Historical Quarterly* (January 1998), *The Modernization of the Louisiana Sugar Industry, 1830-1910* (1987); John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes, 1862-1880* (2001); J. Carlyle Sitterson, *Sugar Country: The Cane Sugar Industry in the South, 1753-1950* (1953); Wendy Woloson, *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002).

### **Tobacco Culture, Flue-Cured**

Jamestown colonists raised the first commercial tobacco in the early 17th century, and the expansion and contraction of plantings varied with international demand and prices. Over the years, farmers developed different varieties that they cultivated throughout the country. After the Civil War, bright tobacco, so called because of its golden color produced by intense heat during curing, became a favorite of cigarette manufacturers. Flues running through the barn provided the heat, leading to the adoption of the name "flue-cured" for this type of tobacco. Growers of flue-cured tobacco changed the traditional work culture by harvesting only several ripe leaves each week instead of cutting the entire stalk. Expert "stringers" took bundles of leaves from "handlers" and tied them to sticks that were hung on tier poles in barns. Increasing cigarette