

About Sugar:

The History of Sugar

Centuries ago, well before a sugar industry first saw the light of day in Europe, sugar was already a food in great demand. In the middle ages, honey above all was used to provide a sweet taste. Later, sugar refineries were built in Europe. They were supplied with imported raw cane sugar which was processed to produce white sugar. Sugar cane thus became the first plant to supply the European sugar market with sugar.

The political events at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th – especially the uprisings in the overseas territories and the economic war between France and England which resulted in the Continental System blockade – paralysed the cane-sugar trade to the European Continent. Substitutes were therefore sought. Fruit, honey, grapes and roots were all tried in turn.

It was then that the work first started at the beginning of the 17th century was resumed by Olivier de Serres, a French agronomist, demonstrating the presence of crystallisable sugar in beet. In 1745, the German chemist Sigmund Marggraf became the first to extract and solidify the juice of this plant. Forty years later, Franz Karl Achard took up Marggraf's work once more. He improved beet cultivation and in 1802 opened the first experimental factory, with such satisfactory results that several more factories were built in Silesia and Bohemia. Its fame soon spread beyond these borders and Europe saw it as the solution to its sugar supply problems.

When the continental blockade was lifted, cane sugar from the colonies flooded the markets once more. Faced with this competition, the once prosperous incipient beet-sugar industry collapsed: a large number of sugar factories were forced to close down after suffering substantial losses. However, this setback was only temporary. Men of talent in every country put all their efforts into reviving the beet-sugar industry. Slowly but surely, beet-sugar factories began re-emerging. And gradually the processing of beet became profitable. The beet-sugar industry progressively strengthened its position on the market through improved techniques, the construction of large production units and the selection of beet.

Today, the European sugar industry is a modern, high-performance sector that is essential for European consumers. Over the last 200 years it has constantly improved its technology and the quality of its products in line with consumer expectations. It also ensures respect for the environment throughout the manufacturing process and helps to maintain European agriculture through the growing of beet. The existence of a strong sugar industry within the framework of the common agricultural policy is a vital factor for the rural areas of the European Union.

