



## SURVEY OF MEMBERS' SATISFACTION/EXPECTATIONS - APRIL 2018

### SYNOPSIS

The Executive Committee and Technical Program Committee initiated a survey, spanning from 2 March to 10 April 2018. Using an electronic reply questionnaire, feedback on ISSCT members' satisfaction and expectations of the Society were obtained. All members who were registered as at the last ISSCT Congress in 2016 in Thailand were contacted for participation. The scope of the survey was wide - aiming at evaluating satisfaction with respect to organization of the last Congress and Workshops, obtaining views on communication within the Society, views on publications of ISSCT and interest in having an ISSCT journal as well as gathering recommendations and suggestions to better serve current and future needs of members.

The 129 respondents to the survey represented 11% of the membership and was considered to be a representative sample to draw meaningful conclusions and recommendations for the way forward. Respondents were from 28 of the 64 member countries of ISSCT, considered to be an adequate geographical spread. The 50-59 years age bracket (36%) represented the majority of respondents. Forty-nine percent (49%) were PhD holders and 67% had more than 20 years of experience within the industry. Some 46% held at least 10 years as ISSCT membership and individual members constituted 79% of the respondents. The sample of members surveyed were predominantly of agricultural research background (42%) compared to factory (19%), management (13%) agricultural suppliers (1%) and factory suppliers (2%) interests.

Based on these member's replies, the following summary can be drawn:

The most important reasons put forward for joining ISSCT were in order of importance: to keep up-to-date with trends in sugarcane production worldwide and be aware of advances in specialized areas, for networking, for participation in workshops and congresses and be part of an established international sugarcane association.

A significant majority (89%) of respondents had attended a previous ISSCT Congress and an equally high 87% rated overall arrangements of the last congress as either excellent or very good. Associated facilities provided scored 65% or above and only 1% rated some of the facilities (transport, conference & equipment facilities) as inadequate. Pre- and post-congress tours were deemed to be either excellent to very good (65%) with a minority of 5% being dissatisfied about sharing of information. To some 12 Congress elements (interactions, value for money, quality of papers, quality of posters, trade exhibitions, etc), the combined scores were above 50% for excellent or very good.

When asked about the preferred length of presentation time, a clear majority of 45% opted for 20 minutes oral presentation, inclusive of questions and both longer or shorter presentation times obtained only half of this rating. A majority of 64% of respondents were in favour of a 5-minute poster presentation in future congresses. **These topics were discussed in detail by the Technical Program Committee and Executive Committee at the Mid-Term Meeting in Tucuman, Argentina in April, 2018. ISSCT will make adjustments at the upcoming Congress in September, 2019 in Tucuman to program most papers at 15 minutes for presentation and have combined discussion sessions, while allowing some 30-minute papers (20+10) on significant topics. We will also implement 5 minute poster presentations without questions, plus a defined poster session where presenters must attend their posters.**

It was requested to rank the preferred topics of members for future congresses format as 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> choices. There were some 62 topics as 1<sup>st</sup> choice, 35 topics as 2<sup>nd</sup> choice, 16 topics as 3<sup>rd</sup> choice and 26 topics as 4<sup>th</sup> choice. There were some repetitions among the topics within one category or suggested topics having the same meaning. When the different topics were compiled, it was observed that most of them listed in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> choice categories had also been formulated as 1<sup>st</sup> choice. Consequently, for all intent and purpose, it is proposed not to differentiate among the four different choices as there were largely common topics. It is to be noted that some topics were rather general, e.g. environment, innovation, new technologies, modernization, experiences, industry review, adoption and variability.

Some topics could be grouped along disciplines lines:

1) On field and crop production, the topics were:

- biotechnology (genetics, disease resistance markers, GMO/transgenic)
- crop improvement and physiology (conventional improvement, germplasm, germplasm diversification, new technologies for cultivar development)
- cultural practices (green cane harvesting, best management practices, agroecology/new practices, novel design of harvesters, precision agriculture, cost benefit ratio)
- economics (cost benefit ratio)
- extension (farmers participation and adoption)
- fertilization (nutrition, soil health, organic material)
- irrigation (best practices, water conservation)
- pathology (virus diseases & global warming, emerging diseases, resistance evaluation, germplasm exchange, frontier between microorganism and pathogen)
- pest management (effect of excessive fertilization on pest incidence)
- weeds

2) On the factory side, the preferred topics were:

- milling (R&D, automation, cane quality, standing cane quality v/s crushed cane, cane preparation, recovery, mill v/s diffusion, crystallization, membrane technology, green technology in processing, increasing capacity of mill tandem, etc.)
- energy (consumption and optimization, bio-energy, efficiency, environment impact, benchmarking with renewable energy)
- co-products (diversification, economic impact for factory and farmers, new products, sub-products, high value/low volume, alternatives uses, value addition)

3) Topical themes of interest mentioned were:

- sugarcane (vs. sugar beet, as a renewable resource, in the bioeconomy, its future, uses according to market demand, in the global economy)
- sugar (outlook, quality, value-addition, meeting the challenges of the anti-sugar lobby, sugar and health, trade, factors affecting production trends)
- climate change (prediction, mitigation, effect on cane)
- sustainability (environmental impact reduction, safe pesticides use, cost effective and improved technologies)
- robotics
- marketing (policy, trends and perspectives, outlook, future realities, economics, new business paradigm, global economy)
- IT (digital agriculture, IOT, AI),

- breakthrough technologies
- land and community issues
- International collaboration and inter-country technology transfer

Research was widely mentioned as a topic under themes such as: fostering international collaboration to resolve regional problems, funding, management for effective practical application, return on investment, taking academic research to the field, old research is new again, CEOs' views on research, inter-country technology transfer.

Fifty percent (50%) of respondents have participated in one or more ISSCT workshops in the last 3 years and there were overwhelmingly positive feedback (>70%) for the workshops and associated arrangements. Respondents were of opinion that Congresses were more expensive to attend, less interactive and the concurrent sessions didn't allow benefiting from all the presentations. On one hand, comments included positive statements such as: the strength of ISSCT is in the Workshops, excellent learning opportunities in small groups, field trips are interesting and useful. On the other hand, some comments were negative, such as: in-ward looking and need to include agronomists from other sectors, becoming like mini-congresses with limited time for discussion, decisions at workshops are seldom followed-up, more debate required and training. **This topic was discussed at the mid-term meeting in Tucuman in April, 2018 and section chairs will be encouraged to include sufficient time for field tours and discussion sections at ISSCT workshops.**

There were mixed reactions for holding workshops and congresses together and judging on the remarks; there were more against than for (15 v/s 10). **Thus, ISSCT plans to continue to hold the management workshop at the Congress, but keep the other workshops separate.** Expense was regularly mentioned as an handicap either for congresses or workshops and attempts need to be made to bring down costs.

The communication and website ratings were judged highly (>80%) for the combined score of very satisfied or somewhat satisfied. Highest scores were received for circulars from Secretariat (97%), in general (96%), workshops organization and participation (93%) and congress organization and participation (90%). Satisfaction was relatively lower among members within region (68%). A majority of 47% consulted the website occasionally while a significant 23% had never or rarely consulted the website. Three months were the desired frequency of communications from ISSCT via internet on different topics.

The survey covered the views of members on how communication could be improved. Communication methods proposed included, the use of social networks such as LinkedIn or Webinars where subjects of interest could be webcasted and developed periodically. Some members felt that emails should continue to be the tool used.

Regarding the type of information/contents, apart from access to ISSCT publications, workshops presentations, members were interested in the initiation of more discussions on topical themes of interest and networking, rather than a one-way dissemination of information. The involvement of the various Sections, Technical Committee and Executive Committee in promoting discussions and follow-up of workshops were also felt desirable. Improvement of communication among members within regions and sections were suggested. In general, members would appreciate to be better informed about developments in the industry of other countries. ISSCT should also be connected to other agencies and societies.

The frequency of communication mentioned include interests such as: fine as it currently is, occasional, regular, higher frequency, flash info, news alert to consult the website, need to increase traffic to the website. A quarterly or more frequent Newsletter was proposed. The communication language was touched upon and more communication in Spanish was requested to get Spanish-speakers more involved.

**The vast majority (89%) of members were satisfied with the Congress Proceedings, and 96% were in favour of continued publishing of selected articles in industry journals. In addition, 75% of respondents were in favour of establishing a new ISSCT sugar journal. The TPC and Executive Committee did consider this option at the Mid-Term Meeting in Tucuman, however there were numerous hurdles to its implementation, including the likely cost of this option, the need to appoint an editor and editorial board, the difficulty in obtaining a significant impact factor, and the business case for bundling the journal to get publisher distribution. For these reasons, the idea of an ISSCT journal was deemed impractical.**

In the Additional Suggestions and Improvements part of the survey, opinions were expressed that ISSCT should do more to be more visible and attract young researchers to join the society. It should promote innovative ideas and be at the front end of research, i.e. actively seeking research projects for funding. It was proposed to offer services to the industry and generate funds. Although there were suggestions to continue with current status, there were strong proposals that ISSCT should have its own journal and the necessity to raise its standard of publications.

## **Conclusions**

The survey has been very useful exercise to gather members' view on ISSCT. It is clear from the survey that the Society is a vibrant one and that there are no major shortcomings. Some lessons can be drawn:

- There is a need to attract more young scientists and sugarcane technologists, and having a more balance representation in the background interest of its members could bring more dynamism.
- Presentations at congresses and workshops need to be re-assessed to leave room for more discussions and debate on hot topics.
- The Society should invite in its midst experts from outside the sugar world to obtain a broader prospective.
- Many of the themes of interest reported in the survey are already under consideration at ISSCT. However, it is apparent that members would like to have more discussion on new technologies (robotics, IT, IOT, AI), sustainability, energy efficiency, market trends and outlook, sugar and health and value addition
- Many members view ISSCT as a central society that could foster international collaboration and bring about regional linkages.
- Although currently well appreciated, communication methods need to reviewed in the light of social media and members would appreciate discussion forums on topics of interest. An effort towards more communication in Spanish would be welcome by the Spanish speakers.