QUARTER 1 | 2026-27 | JULY ISSUE

ECGA Newsletter

Quarterly Newsletter

ESWATINI CANE GROWERS ASSOCIATION

ECGA®

"Cane For Growth"

IN THIS ISSUE

CEO's Note

By Dr Sipho – CEO

I am reminded of the scriptural message about "letting your light shine". The context therein is about spiritual light, but the message is also relevant to everyday ECGA activity/dealings, only that the spotlight should shine on the Association. This newsletter is our torchlight on the Association and NOT its servants. As you read through this version of our online quarterly publication let ECGA and its members dominate your mental picture.

In this issue we focus, among other things, on the role of the Association in the global World Association of Beet and Cane Growers Association (WABCG). The Association spoke in one voice over important issues of common interest such as low sugar price, water and energy challenges and sustainability, to name a few. The sugar world also made a call to involve the youth to ensure fast technology adoption, sustainability and resilience.

This publication introduces the 5-year strategic plan which embraces the calls of the global beet and sugarcane fraternity. Throughout the formulation of the document the principle of "cane for growth" and "nothing involving the stick of sugarcane without growers" were the guiding light and this will not be lost through the implementation process.

Lastly readers in general and cane growers in particular will note that in a little over a month all roads will lead to the 2026 Annual General Meeting to be held at Mhlume Country Club on 26 August 2026. We call upon all approximately 500 quota holders to ensure they are represented. In this forum the Association will not just report on their activities in the past year, but more importantly, will take instructions and seek approval of the agenda for the year ensuing on 1 April 2027. See you there.

Enjoy reading!!

1. WABCG Conference

By Mxolisi Hlophe

The 2026 Annual Council of the World Association of Beet and Cane Growers (WABCG) was held in Helsingborg, Sweden from the 16th to the 18th of June 2026. It brought together grower organizations from more than 30 beet and sugarcane-growing countries representing approximately 60% of global sugar feedstock production. The meeting provided a platform for growers to exchange experiences, discuss emerging challenges, and identify strategies for strengthening the sustainability/resilience and competitiveness of the global sugar industry.

Key Themes of WABCG 2026
The discussions focused on:

• Climate change and its increasing impact on sugarcane and sugar beet production.

• Rising production costs, particularly energy, irrigation, and agricultural inputs.

• Emerging pests and diseases affecting crop productivity.

• Renewable energy adoption and improved water-use efficiency.

• Diversification of sugarcane products and value-add opportunities.

• Strengthening independent grower organizations and enhancing grower representation in industry decision-making and public policy formulation.

• The next generation: what it takes to become a successful young farmer.

• Introducing new technology (including Artificial Intelligence) and knowledge transfer.

Contributions by the Eswatini Delegation

The Eswatini delegation, comprising the CEO and GSM represented the Eswatini Cane Growers Association (ECGA), shared practical experiences and lessons from one of Africa's most productive and irrigated sugar industries.

Key contributions included:

1.Smallholder Empowerment and Industry Transformation

• Eswatini highlighted the successful expansion of smallholder participation in the sugar sector, with community and farmer-owned enterprises now playing a significant role in national production.

• The delegation emphasized the importance of maintaining strong grower organizations to support emerging farmers and preserve technical skills and mentorship.

2. Climate Change Adaptation

• The delegation presented evidence of declining yields caused by changing weather patterns, excessive rainfall during harvesting periods, and the emergence of previously minor pests such as the yellow sugarcane aphid (YSA).

•Eswatini advocated for increased investment in climate-smart agriculture and adaptive technologies to improve resilience.

3. Renewable Energy and Sustainable Irrigation Water Use

•Eswatini showcased ongoing efforts to reduce dependence on imported electricity through solar-powered irrigation systems.

•Delegates reported growing adoption of solar installations by cane growers and encouraged greater international collaboration on renewable-energy solutions for agriculture

4. Water Security and Resource Management

Given the industry's dependence on irrigation, Eswatini emphasized efficient water management, improved irrigation scheduling, and the need for additional water-storage infrastructure to secure future production.

5. Support for Young Farmers and Innovation (Contribution to WABCG final statement)

ECGA played a notable role in shaping the final paragraph of the WABCG final statement. The delegation contributed insights that informed the following agreed text: "***Third, they underline that young farmers should be supported by targeted public policy as they are vital for the future of sugarcane and sugar beet productions. Young farmers bring energy, long-term commitment to the industry and innovation. Regarding innovation, artificial intelligence tools, to be developed or adopted to***

Conclusion

The Eswatini delegation made a valuable contribution to WABCG 2026 by sharing practical experiences in smallholder development, renewable energy adoption, climate resilience, and water/energy nexus management in irrigation. These experiences reinforced Eswatini's reputation as a progressive and innovative sugarcane growing nation while contributing to global discussions on the future sustainability of the sugar industry.

2. Grower & Industry Engagements

By Sethabile Sihlongonyane - Intern

Planters Group Feedback Meetings – April 2026

ECGA successfully held its quarterly Planters Group (PG) feedback meetings for all its 3 Planters Groups during April. The meetings started with the Mhlume Planters Group on the 14th of April, followed by the Simunye Planters Group on the 15th of April, and concluded with the Big Bend Planters Group on the 23rd of April 2026.

At these important sessions, the ECGA office provided growers with quarterly updates on market trends, Estimate 5 sucrose production and prices. A major highlight of the meetings was the training on the newly adopted Relative Sucrose Payment (RSP) system, which was recently approved by the Council for implementation effective 1 April 2026. The Cane Testing Department conducted practical training sessions on the RSP for growers across all three Planters Groups.

Eswatini draft Water Bill 2026 Review

ECGA participated in the stakeholder consultation organised by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Energy on the Draft Water Bill 2026 held on Tuesday 7 July 2026. The session provided a critical platform for reviewing the proposed legislation, which will significantly shape water resource management, irrigation, and water sustainability practices across the country.

During the presentation, officials and Consultants outlined the purpose and key provisions of each section of the Draft Water Bill, highlighting important changes from the Water Act of 2003. Participants engaged in detailed chapter-by-chapter discussions, raising questions and providing valuable input on various aspects of the proposed law.

A key feature of the consultation was the interactive group assignment session. Stakeholders were divided into three focused working groups to examine the Draft Bill from different perspectives.

Water remains a critical input for sugarcane farming, and we will continue to monitor developments and represent the collective interests of all cane growers as the Draft Water Bill moves forward.

Weather Index Insurance Stakeholder Workshop

ECGA actively participated in a high-level Insurance Stakeholder Engagement Workshop held, on 8 July 2026, under the theme: "Weather Index Insurance – An Opportunity for Managing Natural Disasters and Increasing Insurance Penetration in Eswatini."

The workshop explored innovative solutions to help farmers better manage climate risks. Presentations covered Eswatini's economic outlook, the current state of the insurance industry, the regulatory framework for Weather Index Insurance (WII), and parametric products covering drought, flood, and tropical cyclones, with practical use cases in crops, livestock, and social protection.

A strong case for sugarcane growers

For Eswatini's cane growers, the need for effective weather insurance has never been more urgent. The recent hailstorm damage that affected many farms across the regions served as a painful reminder of how vulnerable sugarcane production is to extreme weather events. Hailstorms, droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall patterns are becoming more frequent, causing significant losses in yields and income, particularly for smallholder growers.

Weather Index Insurance is highly suitable for the sugar industry because it offers fast, transparent, and objective payouts triggered by pre-defined weather parameters (e.g., rainfall levels or temperature extremes), rather than lengthy damage assessments.

ECGA follows with keen interest the development of tailor-made Weather Index Insurance products for the agriculture sector as such products could:

i. Protect growers against hailstorm, drought, and flood risks
ii. Improve access to affordable credit by reducing lender risk
iii. Enhance overall resilience and investment confidence in the industry
iv. Support smallholder growers who are most exposed to climate shocks

3. ECGA Road Ahead – Strategic View

By Mxolisi Hlophe

As we enter an increasingly complex operating environment characterised by rising input costs, climate variability, and evolving market dynamics, ECGA has developed a bold, member-centric and driven 5-year strategy to secure the long-term viability and prosperity of Eswatini's sugarcane growers. Our Vision remains clear: **"To ensure a profitable, diversified and sustainable cane grower"**. This new strategy was developed through extensive consultation with growers, our stakeholders and international benchmarks. It directly addresses the key challenges of declining yields, rising costs, climate risks, and governance pressures while building on the achievements of the previous strategy.

The four strategic pillars guiding our future

Pillar 1: Grower Viability & Productivity Recovery

We will focus on restoring and improving farm-level profitability through targeted yield recovery programmes, better agronomic support, cost reduction initiatives and strengthened extension services.

Pillar 2: Governance, Representation & Authority

Stronger governance remains foundational. We will professionalize grower structures, develop and promote minimum governance standards, enhance leadership development, and ensure ECGA continues to speak with one powerful, unified voice, both nationally and internationally.

Pillar 3: ECGA Office -Financial Sustainability & Institutional Capability

At the centre of this pillar is our growers' Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) which will open doors to value chain investments and new revenue streams, while the Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) will deliver affordable, reliable finance to support smallholder growers and fuel farm operations.

We will also focus on office capacitation by strengthening internal systems, developing staff skills, and building technical and operational expertise. This will ensure ECGA has the institutional capacity, efficiency, and professionalism required to deliver high-quality services and effectively champion grower interests in an increasingly complex industry environment.

Pillar 4: Renewal, Reform & Long-Term Industry Resilience

We will promote succession planning for the next generation of growers, sustainability compliance, and climate resilience. This includes strengthening partnerships with millers through Eswatini Sugar to create a more collaborative and future-ready sugar industry.

4. Agriculture Finance Corner

By Mxolisi Hlophe

Unlocking grower prosperity through Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs)

In today's edition of the Agric Finance Corner, we take a closer look at **Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs)** which is one of the most viable and empowering sources of finance for sugarcane growers. The concept of SACCOs dates back to the late 19th century in Germany, where they were created to protect rural low-income communities from exploitative money lenders by providing affordable credit and promoting savings. More than a century later, SACCOs remain highly relevant as a member-owned, sustainable alternative to traditional banking.

What is a SACCO?

A Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO) is a member-owned financial cooperative established to *pool members' savings and provide affordable credit to meet their financial needs*. As a not-for-profit institution, a SACCO uses the collective savings of its members to fund its own loan portfolio. This model enables members to access loans more easily and on better terms than those typically offered by commercial banks. In return, members earn competitive interest on their savings and share in the benefits generated by the cooperative.

SACCOs in Eswatini

SACCOs have gained significant popularity across Eswatini, with tens of thousands of members actively participating. The sector continues to show strong performance and resilience. The latest available data indicates that SACCOs collectively hold approximately E3.3 billion in assets. They maintain healthy indicators across key metrics, including loans and advances, investments, liquidity, savings, profitability, and capital adequacy.

SACCOs in Eswatini are governed by the Cooperatives Act of 2023 and regulated by the Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA). This robust legal and regulatory framework ensures transparency, sound governance, member protection, and overall sector stability.

Advantages of a SACCO for Cane Growers

The strong performance and solid regulatory environment of SACCOs make a compelling case for cane growers to establish their own industry-focused SACCO. Key advantages include:

- Savings: Encourages regular saving habits, helping growers build financial discipline and create a collective capital base for future needs.
- Credit: Provides affordable, timely loans for farm inputs, irrigation, solar systems, replanting, and operational costs, reducing dependence on expensive commercial credit.
- Capacity building: Offers financial literacy training, business management skills, and agronomic support to help members make better financial decisions.
- Interest & returns: Members earn attractive interest on savings while sharing in the cooperative's surplus.
- Value chain opportunities & diversification: Creates opportunities for growers to invest in value-adding activities, input supply, processing, or other commercial ventures through broader structures such as Special Purpose Vehicle.
- By participating in a SACCO, growers can take ownership of their financial future, enabling them to save, access affordable credit, and build a financially stronger and more resilient sugarcane farming community.

5. Upcoming events

By Simphiwe Dlamini

Mark your calendars for the following important events on our calendar.

Planters Group Feedback meetings

Date	PG Meeting	Venue
11 August 2026	Mhlume PG Meeting	Hambanathi Hall
12 August 2026	Big Bend PG Meeting	Phumulamcashi
13 August 2026	Simunye PG Meeting	Caritas, Manzini

ECGA Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Date	Venue	Attendance
26 August 2026	Mhlume Country Club	ECGA members (All Quota Holders)

Important notice to growers

- Admission to the meeting will be restricted to member (Quota Holder) nominated representatives , with **invitation cards, only**.
- Grower companies/ cooperatives to **send one member** to the meeting
- **Proxy form to be signed** and sent to the ECGA Office a day before the AGM

Contact Us

Tell: (+268) 2404 3561
E-mail: info@ecga.co.sz
Website: www.ecga.co.sz