

MEDIA RELEASE

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Singh remains upbeat for a good sugar year

Ishwar Singh was born and raised in Kabisi, Lomawai, Sigatoka, a son of a sugar cane farmer and also his father before that. As a testament to their confidence in the industry, both he and his younger brother have opted to remain in the sugar industry.

This season, Singh expects to harvest over 300 tonnes of cane from his 11 and $\frac{3}{4}$ acre farm. Within this area, a little over 8 acres is under cane, whilst the remainder is dedicated to supplementary vegetable and fruit farming like okra, pumpkin and watermelon.



Above: Singh at his Lomawai farm, ready for the 2019 crushing season harvest

“I bought the neighbouring farm to my father’s farm in 1996. In 1997 I produced 373 tonnes of cane”, says Singh. His cane production reduced significantly in 2010 and 2012 and then again in

2016. The reductions coincided with the years Fiji went through major natural disasters like cyclones, flooding and prolonged drought. This year, after almost a decade, Singh expects to pass the 300 tonne plus mark again.

Singh attributes this accelerated growth to targeted government grower assistance, with subsidies in fertilizer and weedicides that have aided cane crop growth. "I plant the *mana* variety, I tried the *galoa* and the *LF11* before but they do not grow as well on my farm", Singh says.

Last year, he harvested both green and burnt cane. "In July when the mill opened, I was supplying green cane. But by October and November, the cane I sent to the mill was burnt", he says. This is something he is trying to prevent this season.

And he would like to see the mill start-up in June. "So that we can harvest more green cane, leave trash on the farm and reduce weeds", he adds.

Singh has no issues with cane cutters as 90% of the labour is from their own grower community.

"We work together, we have ten cutters from around here, we load an average of five trucks a day", he says. On average, two people can cut one truck. "And we only pay \$18 per tonne per cutter, other places they pay \$25 per tonne", he adds.

Singh's view of the sugar industry is one of perseverance, although last year, they faced rail, truck and mill issues, he says "keep going!" Adding "farmers should look at their farms like business, keep records".

Right: Singh with his wife and son, standing next to the harvested pumpkin from his farm.



He has no plans to sell his farm and in terms of succession planning, he has only one son and two daughters and he has left the decision open. "It's up to my son, if he wants to continue with the farm", Singh said.

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