

# Journal of Agricultural Sciences Research

Acceptance date: 14/05/2025

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUGARCANE MILLS IN MEXICO: HISTORY, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE

---

*Alvaro Palacios Mendoza*

Postgraduate College, Veracruz Campus,  
Veracruz, Mexico

*Eusebio Ortega Jiménez*

Postgraduate College, Veracruz Campus,  
Veracruz, Mexico

*Catalino Jorge López Collado*

Postgraduate College, Veracruz Campus,  
Veracruz, Mexico

*Alberto Asiain Hoyos*

Postgraduate College, Veracruz Campus,  
Veracruz, Mexico

*María del Carmen Alvarez Avila*

Postgraduate College, Veracruz Campus,  
Veracruz, Mexico

All content in this magazine is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).



**Abstract:** This article analyzes the historical evolution of sugarcane mills in Mexico, highlighting their social and economic importance. It addresses the colonial roots of sugarcane cultivation, the industrialization process of the sugar mills, as well as the current role of the sugar sector in the Mexican economy. The research highlights the social impacts, such as the generation of rural employment, and economic impacts, such as the contribution to exports and the domestic market.

## INTRODUCTION

Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) has been one of the most important crops in Mexico's agricultural history. Its introduction during colonial times transformed the productive and social landscape of the country, consolidating its position as a strategic crop. Currently, sugarcane mills play a fundamental role in the economy, not only for sugar production, but also for the by-products they generate, such as ethanol and molasses (Ramírez, 2018).

## ORIGIN AND HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF SUGAR CANE MILLS IN MEXICO

Sugarcane arrived in Mexico in the early 16th century, brought by the Spanish conquistadors. According to Álvarez (2015), Hernán Cortés established the first crops in the Veracruz region, where climatic conditions were favorable for its development. The first sugarcane mills emerged as colonial haciendas that used indigenous and slave labor for cultivation and processing.

During the colonial period, the mills operated with rudimentary technology based on mills driven by mules or hydraulic power. Production was destined both for the local market and for export to Spain and the Caribbean (González, 2017).

With Mexico's independence in 1821, the sugar industry suffered ups and downs due to the country's political and economic instability. However, during the Porfiriato (1876-1911) the industry experienced significant modernization with the introduction of steam machinery, which increased production efficiency (López, 2020).

## THE SUGAR INDUSTRY AND ITS INDUSTRIALIZATION IN THE 20TH CENTURY

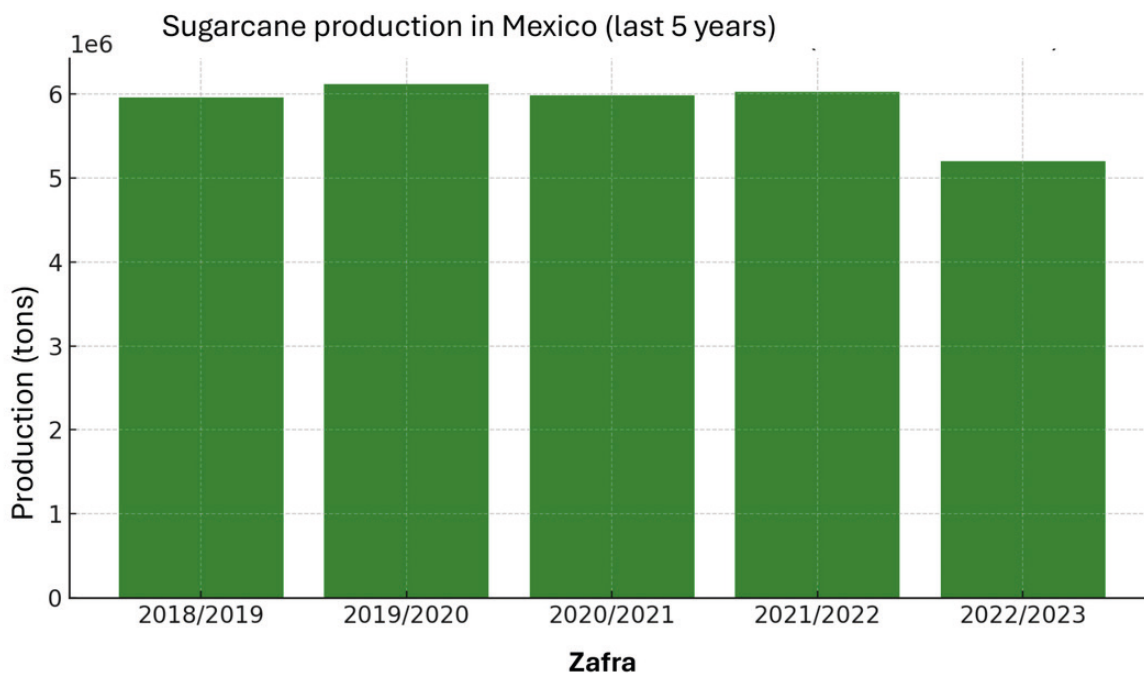
During the first half of the 20th century, the Mexican government implemented policies to promote sugar production. In the 1930s, the agrarian reform promoted by Lázaro Cárdenas expropriated land from haciendas to form ejidos, which allowed peasants to access sugarcane cultivation. According to Moreno (2019), this social restructuring changed the productive dynamics, as the ejidos began to supply the industrial mills.

Starting in the 1940s, the sugar industry was consolidated as one of the economic pillars of the country. The creation of the Fondo de Empresas Expropiadas del Sector Azucarero (FEESA) in 2001 evidenced state intervention to stabilize the industry in the face of financial crises (Castañeda, 2016).

## ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE SUGAR SECTOR

The sugar sector represents a key industry for the Mexican economy. In 2020, Mexico ranked sixth in the world in sugar production, with an approximate volume of 5.8 million tons per year (SIAP, 2021). Sugar is also one of the main agricultural products exported to the United States and other international markets.

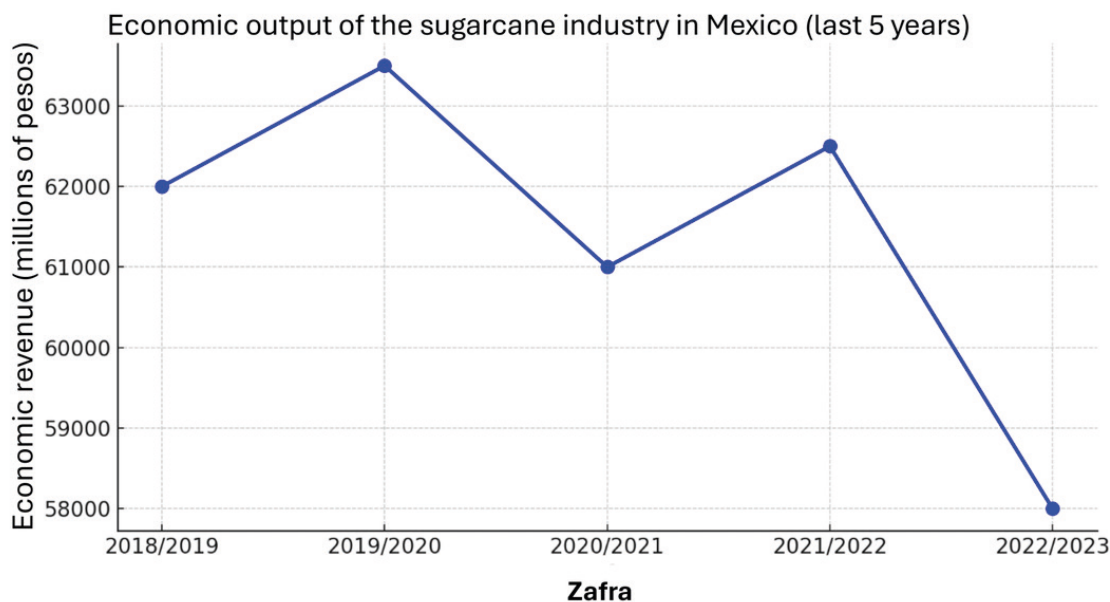
The industry not only produces sugar for domestic and external consumption, but also generates valuable by-products such as molasses, used in the production of alcohol and bioethanol, and bagasse, used as biofuel (Valle, 2019).



Sugarcane production in the last 5 years

#### GRAPH OF SUGAR CANE PRODUCTION IN MEXICO IN THE LAST 5 YEARS

National Committee for the Sustainable Development of Sugarcane (CONADESUCA) (2023). *Informe estadístico del sector agroindustrial de la caña de azúcar en México (Statistical report of the sugarcane agroindustrial sector in Mexico)*. Government of Mexico. Retrieved from <https://www.gob.mx/conadesuca>



Graph of the economic output of the sugarcane industry in Mexico in the last five years

National Committee for the Sustainable Development of Sugarcane (CONADESUCA) (2023). *Informe estadístico del sector agroindustrial de la caña de azúcar en México (Statistical report on the sugarcane agroindustrial sector in Mexico)*. Government of Mexico. Retrieved from. <https://www.gob.mx/conadesuca>



Map of sugarcane production in Mexico.

National Committee for the Sustainable Development of Sugarcane (CONADESUCA) (2023). *Informe estadístico del sector agroindustrial de la caña de azúcar en México* (Statistical report on the sugarcane agroindustrial sector in Mexico). Government of Mexico. Retrieved from. <https://www.gob.mx/conadesuca>

## SOCIAL IMPACT OF SUGARCANE MILLS

The sugarcane sector plays a key role in generating employment, especially in rural areas. According to INEGI data (2020), around 500,000 people depend directly or indirectly on sugarcane, including growers, day laborers, transporters, and mill employees.

However, labor conditions in some mills have been subject to criticism due to labor exploitation and lack of social benefits (Martínez, 2018). Despite this, the industry remains an important source of income for many rural communities.

## CONCLUSION

The development of sugar cane mills in Mexico has been a historical process with profound social and economic implications. From its colonial origins to its contemporary industrialization, the sugar industry has played a key role in the country's economy. Although it faces challenges related to international competition and price fluctuations, its importance for exports, rural employment generation and biofuel production maintains it as a strategic sector for Mexico.

## REFERENCES

- Álvarez, R. (2015). Historia económica de la caña de azúcar en México. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Castañeda, J. (2016). La industria azucarera mexicana: desafíos y oportunidades. *Revista de Economía Agrícola*, 25(2), 45-63.
- González, M. (2017). La caña de azúcar en la época colonial: su impacto en la economía novohispana. *Historia Mexicana*, 66(3), 123-150.
- INEGI. (2020). Estadísticas del sector agrícola: caña de azúcar.
- López, D. (2020). El azúcar en el Porfiriato: modernización y monopolio. *Estudios Históricos Mexicanos*, 15(4), 89-112.
- Martínez, P. (2018). Condiciones laborales en los ingenios azucareros: una revisión crítica. *Revista Latinoamericana de Estudios Sociales*, 10(1), 35-60.
- Moreno, L. (2019). La reforma agraria y su impacto en el cultivo de caña en México. *Anuario de Estudios Agrarios*, 14(1), 78-94.
- Ramírez, A. (2018). Producción azucarera y economía rural en México. *Revista de Estudios Sociales*, 12(2), 150-168.
- SIAP. (2021). Producción de caña de azúcar en México: estadísticas 2020. Secretaría de Agricultura y Desarrollo Rural.
- Valle, R. (2019). Subproductos de la caña: perspectivas en la producción de bioetanol. *Revista de Energía y Biocombustibles*, 7(4), 25-40.