

# Sugar Cane

*Although Louisiana and Florida are the major sugar cane producers in the Southeast, the crop has been grown on a limited basis in Georgia since the 1700's.*

As early as 1735, Indians along the Savannah River were using sugar cane to make a drink similar to rum. Throughout the latter part of the eighteenth century, Georgia growers cultivated cane, and although rum was made from the juice, efforts to make sugar met with little success.

Along Georgia's coastal area, conditions were similar to those of the cane producing regions of Louisiana. But, though there was rich soil and adequate rainfall, the area was considered only marginal for cane production due to the threat of cold weather damage.

Growers began experimenting with sugar cane production in the early 1800's, but several factors delayed expansion of sugar culture. The Embargo and Non-intercourse acts and the War of 1812 placed Southern agriculture in a depressed condition because they prohibited shipment of goods to other countries. In addition, planters already burdened by debt did not care to sink money into the cultivation of what they considered an experimental crop they knew little about. The high prices of cotton and rice further removed the incentive to undertake a new crop.

Production increased in the 1820's when the decline in cotton prices caused planters throughout Georgia to look for new staple crops. By

this time, some farmers were planting a few acres of sugar cane for their own use.

But a violent hurricane struck the coast of Georgia in 1824 and caused much damage to the plantations around Savannah. Afterwards, cane cultivation tended to move southward and became centered around the mouths of the Altamaha, Satilla and St. Marys Rivers. In the late 1820's there were approximately a hundred plantations in the Altamaha region cultivating cane to some degree.

By 1833, sugar cane production had reached its peak in coastal Georgia. However, by that time the intensive labor requirements for planting, harvesting, and preparing the crop for market caused some planters to abandon production. The additional expense necessary to construct an efficient mill for cane processing also discouraged production.

From 1836 to 1840, sugar prices remained low while prices of cotton and rice increased. Fields that had been devoted to cane were utilized for other crops. During that time, cane was grown by only a few plantations in the Altamaha region and Georgia produced only 330,000 pounds. The crop could not compete successfully with rice in the coastal region, and most planters in Glynn and Camden Counties abandoned