



# Umbonowethu

March 2022



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# The First Word



Since 2009, USM has been targeting a crush of more than 1.3 million tons in a 36-week season. Last season the USM Team crushed 1.32 million tons in just under 38 weeks. The mill can't crush cane on its own, this was a great USM team effort. Well done Team USM. As Nelson Mandela famously said, "it always seems impossible until it is done." Interestingly, the first cane estimates received for the 2022/23 season exceeded 1.42 million tons and unfortunately the Umfolozi Mill Group Board will not be able to give allocations to all growers; priority must be given to growers with existing cane supply agreements.

This challenge is partly attributable to the financial crisis that the South African sugar industry finds itself in. In essence, the financial wellbeing of millers has been eroded in past seasons by drought, sugar imports, the sugar tax (or Health Promotion Levy) and additional sugar supply from eSwatini, most of which have displaced South African sugar from the higher valued local market to exporting this sugar at a loss.

The solution rests with the government's Sugar Master Plan process, which has the broad options of (1) increasing local market demand for South African sugar (2) facilitating the diversification of sugar into other products that are higher value than export sugar (3) closing some mills so less sugar is produced and exported at a loss or (4) a combination thereof. We were fortunate last season, the 2022/23 season is going to be tough. USM's position is clear, we will be the last mill crushing.

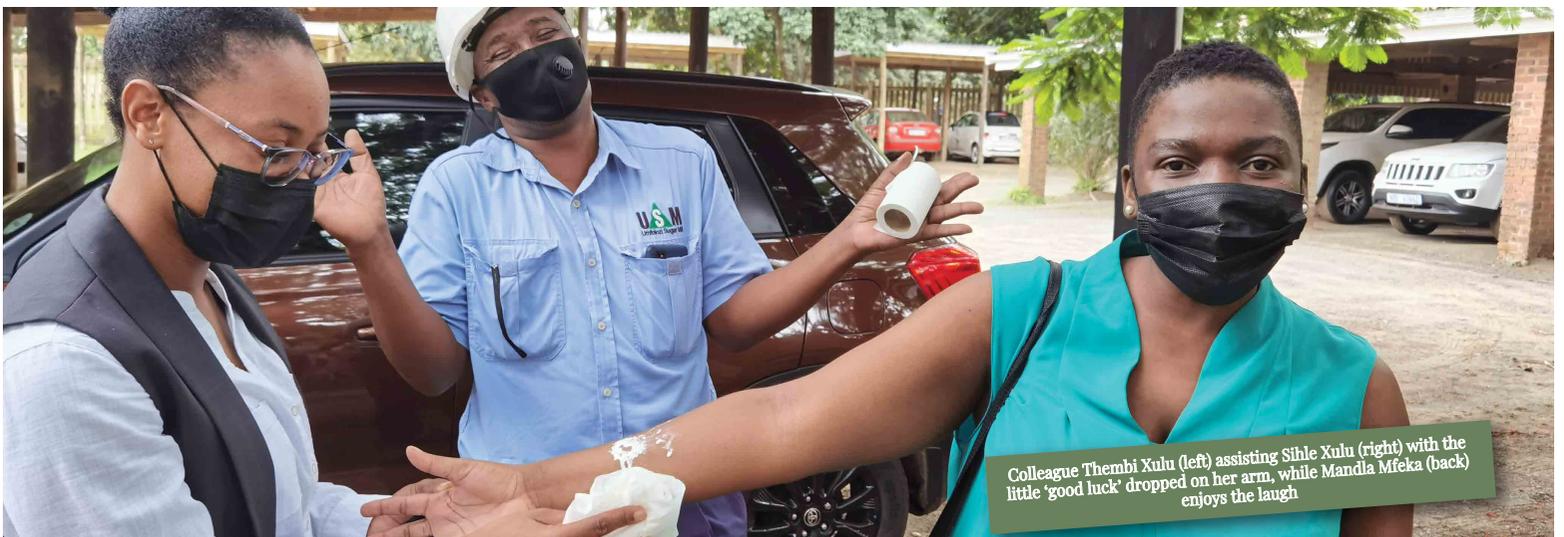
To achieve this vision going forward, as the USM Team, we have work to do:

- As a collective Team we need to be **LEAN**, as individual Team members we **MUST** eliminate any form of waste.
- As a collective Team we need to be **AGILE**, as individual Team members we **MUST** embrace new systems that are simple quick and effective.
- As a collective Team we need to **TRAIN, COACH AND MENTOR**, as individual Team members we **MUST** welcome learning opportunities and strive to continuously improve.

Enjoy this issue of the Umbonowethu, in which you will see that we are well on our way in most of the above areas. The challenge is to pick up momentum in all these areas so that we will indeed be the last mill crushing. Viva Team USM!  
As always, work smarter, work together, have fun and be safe!

Adey

# Good Luck Sihle



Zulu people often refer to themselves as 'the people of the heavens'. Considering their affinity for and cultural beliefs surrounding birds, it is no wonder any interaction with the feathered kind is always met with great excitement.

There is also the widespread belief of bird droppings bringing good luck. It is based on how uncommon it is to be pooped on by one. It is even regarded as more unlikely than winning the lotto, so if a bird chooses you, you will be gifted with extreme luck!

If this is indeed the case, Sihle Xulu must regard herself as one lucky lady.

Mandla Mfeka shares a recent incident in the USM parking lot, involving Sihle and a certain deposit from a flying object overhead right on top of her.

"According to our culture, if a bird makes a dropping on your head, or your arm, or anywhere on your body, it is good luck. In Zulu we call it 'Ngikufisela inhlanhla', meaning 'I wish you good luck'. So that is what we are saying to Sihle now!"

# New Season Excitement

*"Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is a success."* - Henry Ford

This sentiment was echoed loud and clear when the record 1.3 million tons of sugar cane crushed during the 2021/22 season was celebrated at the annual Umfolozi Sugar Mill off-crop braai. Working as a team, we can repeat this great effort next year." The herculean effort was also praised by Chief Executive Officer Adrian Wynne. While celebrating the fantastic year the company had, he also reminded us to be ready for the challenges of the new year.

"We should never lose sight of our vision of keeping our customers, the growers, the employees, the community, and the shareholders happy. We can't change our external environment, but we can crush all available cane we have and make as much sugar as we can. With a strong business, we can keep our jobs and help the community to thrive." Operations Director Jean Erasmus applauded the USM team for making the impossible, possible.

"Look around you, you are surrounded by great people and fellow employees. Together we will face the future and we will make sure that USM remains the last mill crushing." The stellar team effort was also singled out by Chief Financial Officer Anesen Naidoo, as the reason for the incredibly successful season. "You managed to achieve a remarkable milestone, enjoy it! There are tough times ahead, but I know Team USM will step up their game. We will continue to work hard, and work smart." HR executive Vusi Tembe kept it short, but sweet in his recognition. "This is a hardworking team that achieved something fantastic. Continue doing the same, and we will break another record next year."

**"We should never lose sight of our vision of keeping our customers, the growers, the employees, the community, & the shareholders happy."**

## Umbonowethu caught up with some of the USM colleagues that work in the plant, and the buzz words of "teamwork" ran like a golden thread.



**General Maintenance Worker - electrical, Xolani Gaza** who joined the mill in October last year said he expects next year to be more of the same. "We need to keep on communicating clearly with one another, and also with management. It is important to keep that door open."

**Tipper Attendant, Nkosinathi Khoza** was full of praise for the work ethic of the whole USM team. "We are always pushing to do things safely and to prevent accidents. And the key to do this is good communication."

Hope for the future is what stood out for **Junior Process Engineer, Sbusiso Mdakane**. "We should always try and look for new ways of motivating each other. If we can do this, we will get more good results and break the record again next season."

The positivity about this year's massive achievement oozed out of **Bagging Machine Operator, Smanga Ndwandwe**. "It was a good opportunity to rise above difficult circumstances. We must double the effort next time and continue to keep our customers happy with the production."



Staying focussed and achieving the right levels of overall recovery throughout the whole process to leave no crystal behind is what this team strives for.

# Leaving No Crystal Behind

For Production Manager Sabelo Gcabashe sugar recovery is self-explanatory. It is exactly what it says. He is also at pains to state that we are not in the process of making sugar but rather in the process of recovering sugar.

## So how does it actually work?

Sabelo explains.

“Sugar recovery actually starts from the front-end in the form of extraction. And then from there, once it's extracted, it goes to the back-end as a sugar solution, which is called mixed juice. That's why we say don't waste fluids because that contains our product. We've got a saying that 'product on the floor, money out of the door'.”

It is clear that 'zero waste' are the words of the moment. Sabelo makes sure to get them as often as possible.

“We want to encourage the people that work in recovery to have zero waste. The first question you ask is, why should we prevent waste throughout the process? Because then everyone will start thinking differently as to what it is they have to do to prevent waste.

I believe once they understand that they will come up with their own ways to actually prevent that waste from happening.

“Striving to achieve the right levels of overall recovery throughout the whole process is of utmost importance. For Sabelo it starts right at the beginning.

“The term that is normally used to show the recoveries in the front-end is called extraction. And the term that is used on the back-end side for recovering is called boiling house recovery. When you combine both, you see the bigger picture, the product of the two which is overall recovery.” Sabelo says it is important to stay focused on the efforts to leave no crystal behind during the recovery process.

“You just need to teach yourself to know how to balance things. If you're at work, you just need to be able to give a 100%. If you are a manager at work, then be a manager at work. So for us to keep the right balance, we need the right tools and that comes from learning how things are done.”

## Meet the Superstar 'Class of 2022'

**“We don't have a big, bulky team at USM. So, everybody's got to pull his or her weight. And that's what we are looking for – people who can stand out individually and just as important, form part of a team.”**

The message from Training Manager Johan Bester is clear on what they are looking for when deciding on the in-service trainees at USM. Combining the company's needs and the students' passions has been a winning recipe to finding the right fit. Johan says it is a continuous monitoring and mentoring process after the students arrive at USM. “A lot of credit must go to Deena Govender in doing these assessments so we can keep the students on track and make sure that they understand what they have learned and studied. And also, to tell them to not put the books away but keep on refreshing yourself.” It is however not only a case of what the students can learn at USM but also what the company can gain from the youngsters' enthusiasm to acquire new skills. Johan says it is refreshing. “By getting these fresh young youngsters in, they show us what can be done. We try and get local talent as we want to give them a chance to succeed in life. We take note of them so that at the end of their study period, we think 'This is somebody I'd like to employ'.”



Johan Bester, Training Manager



**Nomeliszwe Nxumalo - Process**

I have a national diploma in Chemical Engineering from the Mangosuthu University of Technology. One of the first projects I worked on was the water tank where we had to improve the purity results and I really enjoyed it. I had to get used to the heat though, it was a bit of a shock at first. But the thing is, if you are really passionate about something, you have to adapt to uncomfortable situations sometimes and love the environment that you're in. My brother, Thabiso Nxumalo who is a mechanical engineer, has inspired me to never give up.



**Singqobile Khumalo - Cane Supply**

I got my Diploma in Crop Production from the College of Agriculture in Empangeni because I want to help my community with food insecurity. These skills will help me improve the situation. My father, Mholemi Khumalo, is a hard-working man and he has been my biggest inspiration. I love agriculture but didn't realise there was so much paperwork, you have to give attention to even the smallest details and plan properly. My message to future trainees here at USM, is to maximise the opportunities you are given.



**Mandisa Geabashe - Instruments**

I received my national diploma in Electrical Engineering at Mangosuthu University of Technology in 2017 and then went on to get a BTEC in Electrical Engineering from the Durban University of Technology. Growing up I initially wanted to be a doctor, but then things changed until I found the right fit for me, which was electrical engineering. I have to thank my dad, Themba Simamane, as he inspired me to explore this field, even though I'm a woman. To be honest, I'm learning a lot, and the things that I learned in school, I come across them now. And it's starting to make sense as I put the puzzle together.



**Hlengiwe Zulu - Process**

I am currently holding an S4 level towards my national diploma in Chemical Engineering from the Mangosuthu University of Technology. My mentor here at USM is process engineer Monica Zinzi and I'm learning a lot from her, she really inspires me, as a teacher and a friend. As a chemical engineering student, it is great to see everything in action at the mill that I've learned about in theory. I've had to work very hard to be in this industry, but I believe in myself. For this, I must say thanks to my mother, Neli Zulu, because she's always wanted her children to be successful.



**Thobile Ndwandwe - Finance**

I studied financial management at Ezagaweni campus (FET college) and will go on towards my diploma once I get the necessary experience. Studying finance is not easy but my brother, Nhlakanipho Jobe who is a teacher, always tells me you must not let anything stop you from learning. The team here at USM is also very supportive and encouraging and I've learned a lot from them. I have really improved my skills by asking the right questions and by being open to receiving the answers.



**Mdletshe Ntethelelo - Instrumentation**

I studied Electrical Engineering at the Durban University of Technology. The mill was stripped down when I arrived here. But even though it wasn't a pretty picture, it gave us a chance to learn more and understand it much better. It was really amazing because we only knew the theory, we didn't ever experience any machine running. I want to say thank you to USM for the many things I've learned so far and for the many more things I'm expecting to learn. I've been given the chance to become an engineer and I respect them for that. I would also like to thank my sister, Nomthandaza Mdletshe for her support and encouragement throughout my studies.

**Nobuhle Mgwaba - Human Resources**

I have a diploma in Human Resources from Mangosuthu University of Technology and last year received my bachelor's degree in Human Resource Management. I love working with people so for me it's all about understanding employees in the workplace and how to communicate with them. It is good to get yourself in other people's shoes and see where they are coming from. My grandmother, Mildred Mgwaba has been my biggest inspiration to get to where I am today. The biggest lesson I've learned so far is to always remain calm in every situation and create a healthy work environment. And also, to continuously try and understand each other.



**Lungelo Ntuli - Laboratory**

I studied chemical engineering and even though it has been challenging at times, I've been curious about discovering things ever since I was in high school. I always wanted to find out more, about why this thing is happening, how this thing is happening, how is this product being formed. I must give thanks to Mr. Zephaniah Zakwe who was my physical science teacher at Nkosana High School. Teachers are the people that you are daily involved with and know your abilities. My advice to future employees of USM is that they need to push themselves and prove that they are capable of doing things on their own.

# Superb Safety Spotters



Siphwe Magutshwa - Sampler

Philisiwe Mpanza - Boiler Operator

Sibusiso Ncube - Multi Carrier Operator

Safety at work is of vital importance, especially in a factory setting like here at USM. We always encourage our employees to preserve and observe workplace safety guidelines.

This is where the stellar team of safety spotters has a major impact on operations. For Sibusiso Ncube, Philisiwe Mpanza, and Siphwe Magutshwa safety always comes first. The best of all? They volunteered for the positions. Now that's commitment to the greater good!

Says Sibusiso: "No one forced me to do this. I just put up my hand and said 'Yes, I want to do this!'. We got together as a team and decided we want to make a difference." Even though it's an important role and not something to take lightly, for Philisiwe enjoyment is part and parcel of the job. "I wanted to do something to avoid incidents at work. And now I enjoy walking around and checking if

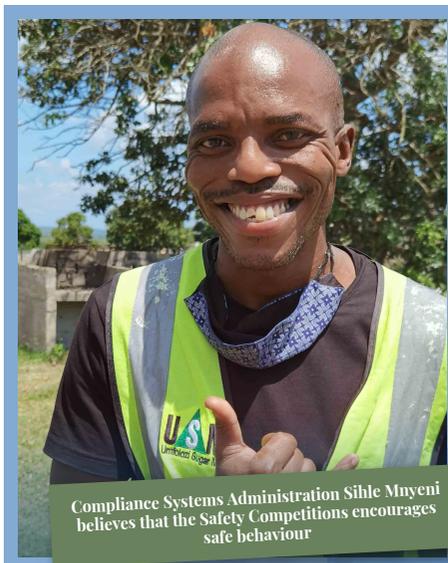
everyone is safe. I also remind people of things they may forget, and I approach them with good intentions."

Siphwe acknowledges that sometimes people can be a bit hesitant when they are being helped in regards to safety concerns.

"I want to help run an organisation that is hazard free and if there's a lot of waste lying around, you can injure someone. We have to be focused and pay attention to certain things to avoid being negligent."

## What is 5S exactly, and why is it important for USM?

*It stands for sort, set in order, shine, standardise and sustain. In practice, it means the reducing of waste and the optimising of productivity if a workplace is clean, uncluttered, safe, and well-organised.*



Compliance Systems Administration Sihle Myeni believes that the Safety Competitions encourages safe behaviour

Here at the mill, the 5S Safety Competition has been running for the last two years. And the participation and contribution of all departments have been fantastic, says Compliance Manager Gwen Wareham.

"It has become so much more than just a word; it is about making the workspace safer and more productive. The competition has been encouraging competitiveness which in return has been promoting improvement on all levels. It has to do with that internal pride that pushes you to be better." Gwen explains there is a certain precision when it comes to the inspections that determine the eventual winners. "There is a specific schedule, with the inspection teams being audited to prevent bias. During the crushing season, it's a monthly occurrence. In off-crop, it happens weekly. There are therefore actually two competitions." The 5S Safety Competition doesn't replace the internal safety audits, says Gwen. It rather adds to make sure all departments are compliant.

"Audits are generally looking at all the systems and reviewing them, we do it quarterly. There are up to 50 inspection points for the compliance team to look at, including general and food safety."

According to Gwen 5S ties in perfectly with the company's directive of 'zero waste' and 'zero safety incidents'.

"Safety is all about keeping people safe in the workplace. Accidents happen because people take shortcuts and are negligent. And in regard to waste, be aware of how it affects productivity. It is about these choices that will make your life easier, safer, and more productive, rather than harder."

Even though safety in the workplace is a serious issue, compliance systems administrator Sihle Myeni says he wouldn't want to do anything else. "I enjoy walking around and reminding people of the important things here at the mill. I fall in love with what I do every day. I am getting exposure to this specific field." He agrees that the 5S Safety Competition is helping to encourage safe behaviour. "Safety is very important because, at the end of the day, we need people to do the work and if people are not safe, it brings down the morale."



Maintenance Foreman Baekend, Hannes Theron and Process Engineer Monica Ndlazi checks the Backend Mechanical Workshop's 5S safety stats during an offerop Safety Competition inspection

# Making the best of the Barcode

*The Barcode Project has been Management Accountant Bongani Xaba's pride and joy. And using the information it provides to measure efficiency, adds incredible value to operations.*



"This project allows us to check out material from procurement right through the process flow. We can also utilise it to see how efficient each shift is because we now do have that information."

Bongani points out how the project plays an important part in the efforts to minimise waste.

"Those are the keywords, zero waste. It's a dream for any operation. I think we will see more value in this current financial year. And when we get those reports, we should be able to see the value added to the production of USM."

It makes sense to explore the possibility of more ventures like the Barcode Project, as it will help eliminate waste and minimise costs, says Bongani.

"I think we don't have a choice, really, it's the way to go. Because the right information is key. When things are automated, you tend to get the right information compared to when you have to rely on three, four, or five people to prepare the reports for you. You have to be able to run a tight ship with the correct information."

Bongani adds that the days of working tediously and monotonously are long gone.

"You need to embrace faster information; your stakeholders need to have the information at their fingertips. Because sometimes they want to make a decision now, they don't have the luxury to wait. So, we really have to embrace it and we will see the value throughout the business once we do that."



The system is fully automated and allows for zero errors with performance tracked in each of the key areas. Seen here scanning is Receiving Clerk, Vusi Mavundla, Stores Manager Munroe Ramnarayan and Receiving Clerk Thokozani Sibiya

# Life is a balancing act

"Balance is not better time management, but better boundary management. Balance means making choices and enjoying those choices." These are wise words from business consultant Betsy Jacobson.

During USM's Wellness Week employees were made aware of the balance they need to keep in managing their lives, at work and at home. They were offered general wellness check-ups, including blood pressure, cholesterol, sugar, and HIV testing. We managed to speak to a couple of employees about the importance of the right work-life balance.

### **Themba Mabika - Maintenance Worker (Instrumentation)**

If you know your status and look after yourself, you will live longer, and your mind is free of thinking bad things. It is also important for your family at home when you know you are healthy, everyone is happy.

### **Lucky Bhikili - Winch Operator (Extraction Operations)**

It was good to get the opportunity to check my sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol. It will be great if we can do it again.

### **Phindile Mavundla - Hyster Driver (Warehouse)**

You have to be strong to do your job, so it is very important to be healthy. I will take this information home to inform my family as well. Because if you're not healthy, then automatically your mind is not going to function properly at work.

### **Zimisele Ndadababa - Artisan Hand (Fabrication)**

We make things happen here at the mill, we have to fix things and run around the boiler. So there's some stress in this working environment with all the walking around in the heat. For me, it's important to stay healthy and not injure myself as I have to fix problems when things go wrong.

### **Mandla Zungu - General Worker (Power Gen Maintenance)**

Every day I have to make sure the mill is clean and play my part in keeping everything working. If I'm not healthy, then I won't be able to do my job. If I get checkups like blood pressure and cholesterol, I know what to do if something is wrong. I want to ask everyone to please stay safe, stay alive and stay happy.



# Cane Supply



USM Cane Supply Extension Officer, Sinqobise Qwabe is seen here with a group of farmers from Madwaleni Zone Thokozani

Speaking to employees across the board, it is clear that Umfolozi Sugar Mill and its operations are driven by a united effort, that teamwork is at the heart of the company's work ethic. It is therefore no wonder that after a record season, the cane supply division is heaping praise on all those involved in achieving this remarkable feat.

Cane Supply Manager Senzo Mahlinza leads the way.

"I'd like to extend my gratitude to the whole cane supply chain and I would also like to take my hat off to our growers. It wasn't easy and there were a lot of challenges, but we delivered way more than we thought we could. And now we want to do even better this year, and bridge all those gaps." The key to making sure USM will always be the last mill crushing, is communication, says Grower Support Manager Thembeke Maseko.

"Building good relationships with good communication is how the team rides the waves. That, and good planning to ensure there is sufficient cane to be crushed. In this regard, I really want to commend the growers because they came through for us. Whether it was a small-scale grower, a large-scale grower, or a land reform grower, it showed that teamwork makes everything possible."

Senzo echoes this, saying there is tremendous trust between USM, the growers, and the suppliers.

"You know, it is very difficult to juggle the numbers and to continuously make sure that there is enough to work with. This is why communication is so important, we have to maintain these open lines to build good relationships.

Whenever we say 'Guys, we need more cane', there is always someone that steps in and covers these gaps." For Thembeke support and training to ensure continued growth, is another important factor in the mill's success.

"We have continuous contact with the growers on agronomic principles, to help them take care of their crops. It is part of our mandate to give the growers practical and constant assistance in the form of contact sessions."

Despite a bumper season, Senzo says there is always room for improvement. "We can always do better, even after achieving a record like we just did. It's going to be tough again this year. So we just need to make sure that we will be ready for the big season ahead."

## CSI Projects



USM HR Clerk, Siphon Tembe hands over a set of branding banners as part of the USM Employee's Children School Project to Acting Principal Rita Meyer



Teachers and learners from Welani Creche receives tables, chairs and an assortment of colouring books and tools as part of the mill's annual December Gift to one creche identified by the Cane Supply team within their Small Scale Grower Zone



USM CEO Adey Wynne and Civils Maintenance Foreman (now retired) Terry Bazley (back) joins SAPS Mtubatuba members (L.L.R.) Sgt. FP Dladla, Sgt. ST Nene, Capt. HL Zikhali, WO DM Ntuli and Mr. NB Myeni during an informal handover of an outdoor meeting place where SAPS meetings now takes place to prevent the spread of the Covid-19 virus