

# Second generation Thai farmer rings the praises of the Bell Cane Loader

**The central Suphan Buri province of Thailand is home to a 3 200 hectare sugarcane operation that has been in the Sompong family for almost 60 years. Mr Sirichai Sompong, a second generation farmer, has an impressive fleet of sixteen Bell Cane Loaders, and spoke highly of their performance and how they have positively impacted on his operation during a recent visit to the Bell factory in Richards Bay, South Africa.**

Mr Sompong's father first started farming the land 57 years ago. At 16-years of age, Mr Sirichai Sompong joined the operation and has been successfully working the land for over 40 years. With fertile land that yields about 120 tonnes per hectare - and up to 140 tonnes per hectare in the first ratoon - the farm averages 300 000 tonnes per season.

This is largely achieved by using a combination of drip and flood irrigation techniques, however, there are also remote areas of dry land and one of the challenges is to reach peak productivity in these areas. With a low sugar price, Thai farmers also face the challenge of trying to yield high sucrose levels as those with sucrose levels over 10% benefit from an incentive bonus.

The harvesting season runs from late November through to April and cutting is done manually with 700 workers. During the off-crop these labourers busy themselves with general farm tasks such as applying herbicides and fertiliser as well as planting, as in Thailand sugarcane fields are replanted after every two to three years. The Bell Loader fleet is invaluable in this exercise, carting bundles of seed cane to freshly prepared fields.

The Sompongs make use of 40 road trucks to take their sugarcane to the mill, each of which pull tandem trailers carrying a 40t load. Due to the extent of the operation, cane is delivered to different mills depending on the location, with hauls varying from 20km to 100km.

Loading of the trucks takes place infield and the operation made use of modified tractors for this purpose before introducing the first Bell Loader, a Bell 120, 25 years ago. In spite of the modified tractors having limited manoeuvrability and being quite costly to operate, using about 15 litres of fuel per hour, there were skeptics who initially doubted the acceptability of the Bell Cane Loader.

Mr Sompong explains that some farmers thought the Bell Loader, having no steering wheel, would be too difficult to operate. The operator of his modified tractor was himself wary of the new machine and Mr Sompong had to hire a new operator for the Bell Loader.

However, it wasn't long before the Bell 120 proved its worth and Mr Sompong steadily started to grow the fleet

to also include the larger Bell 125 models. The last two Bell Loaders were purchased in 2016.

He is particularly impressed with his Bell Loaders' fuel consumption figures of about 7 litres per hour - less than half of that of a modified tractor. Their ability to turn quickly and load from all directions also means that they are faster to load. Other benefits include minimal downtime and low maintenance costs. Mr Sompong also likes that the loaders are strong with excellent longevity. The odometer on one of his older machines has already reset itself.

Just as important as the machine is the solid service he receives from his dealer, CMS Machinery Company Limited, which takes care of all servicing requirements of his fleet. With strong reliable machines and strong reliable support, it comes as no surprise that Mr Sompong intends placing an order for two additional units, to take his fleet to 18.



*(From left): Mr Surachai Saewong (sugarcane customer), Miss Nannaphat Phosrithong (CMS Machinery Co., Ltd), Mr Suyatnoh Yadoni (Maximum Equipment Singapore), Mr Muhammad Juferi (Maximum Equipment Singapore), Miss Wantanee Sirichai (sugarcane customer), Mr Kriangsak Arayatanon (CMS Machinery Co., Ltd), Mr Sompong Sirichai (sugarcane customer), Mr Raj Singh (Bell Equipment), Miss Wipaporn Sirichai (sugarcane customer), Mr Tim Beningfield (Bell Equipment), Mr Johari Ahmad (Bell Equipment Australia /Asia), Mr Udom Arayatanon (CMS Machinery Co., Ltd) during a customer visit to the Bell factory.*

