Will there be a cost for sugarcane growers if the focus of production changes from sugar to energy?

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Driven by the soaring unpredictable oil prices, concerns about security of energy supply, clean renewable energy, global climate change, job creation and rural development, many sugarcane-growing countries of the world are looking at moving from sugar only producers to energy producers. In South Africa this requirement has been exacerbated by an energy crisis arising from an inability of the only electricity provider to supply sufficient electricity for the massive increase in demand driven by the unexpected growth of the economy. Grown mainly on the eastern seaboard, sugarcane certainly has the potential to be a biofuel or electricity feedstock but a move from farming for sugar to farming for energy would require a change in farm practice, factory design and management and cane payment. This poster will focus on farm practices, identifying the changes and cost of moving from harvesting and transporting clean, burnt cane to green cane. The cost of making such changes are quantified and translated into equivalent base price for electricity. The more surplus energy available for sale from the sugar factory, the more cost-effective the new farming operation becomes. The current purchase price for electricity does not make this option economically viable.

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