

Press release

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SBR summit at the Südzucker plant in Offenau: Measures against the reed glass-winged cicada are beginning to show results

At the invitation of the South German SBR Task Force, more than 150 experts from across Germany met in Offenau on 15 October 2025 to discuss current developments in the fight against the reed glass-winged cicada and to present new research approaches. The reed glass-winged cicada transmits two bacteria that cause the so-called SBR complex, which poses a major threat to domestic sugar beet cultivation. Potato cultivation and many other vegetable varieties are now also affected. To better address the challenges posed by the plant disease, Südzucker AG has been involved in the SBR Task Force, which was founded two years ago, from the very beginning. The measures that have been developed since then to combat the reed glass-winged cicada and the two bacterial diseases are showing initial success this year, which was presented at the SBR Summit.

The summit, organized by the SBR Task Force, provided representatives from politics, science and research, federal and state institutions, associations representing sugar beet, potato and vegetable growers, as well as breeders and company representatives from sugar companies and potato processors with in-depth insights into ongoing cicada research projects. In a practical part, SBR experts explained the infestation situation for sugar beets, potatoes and vegetables at various stations in the field. At a subsequent lecture event at the Offenau sugar factory, the Task Force gave presentations on its own SBR advisory strategy, new findings on the reed glass-winged cicada, current research projects and federal departmental research.

The SBR Task Force's strategy is showing initial success

The new, integrated approach to combating the reed glass-winged cicada involves a set of measures for plant nutrition and strengthening, keeping plants healthy and crop rotation. Another part of this strategy is the use of more robust varieties and insecticides. Beet yields and sugar content in the current beet campaign are above last year's levels, and the population of the reed glass-winged cicada was reduced in 2025, thereby reducing the risk of infection.

Emergency approvals will also be necessary in 2026 as part of the integrated control approach to reduce the cicada population in the affected and continuously expanding infested areas. Emergency approvals are an essential temporary solution to limit yield losses. "Our medium-term goal is to obtain regular approval for effective insecticides against the reed glass-winged cicada," says Dr. Georg Vierling, Head of Beet Cultivation and New Plants at Südzucker AG and head of the SBR Task Force. "Accelerated and simplified approval procedures for these plant protection products are therefore urgently needed."

Breeding research is also a high priority in the fight against the reed glass-winged cicada. The cultivation of tolerant or resistant varieties is a central component of plant protection. To effectively combat the geographical spread of the reed glass-winged cicada and its transition to other host plants in the long term, the interaction between host plant, vector, pathogen and the genetic basis of the host-pathogen interaction must be researched. The SBR Task Force's key demands on policymakers are therefore the regular approval of effective insecticides, the adaptation of GAEC regulations ("minimum soil cover") to allow for bare fallow and support for research into cultivation systems, storage stability and processing quality of sugar beets, as well as research funding for biological and biotechnological control methods.

SBR and Stolbur

The two bacterial diseases Stolbur and Syndrome Basses Richesses (SBR) are transmitted by the reed glass-winged cicada and have been threatening domestic food production for several years. In addition to sugar beets, potatoes and other vegetables are also severely affected. The diseases are spreading further in Germany and neighboring areas and can lead to dramatic yield losses or even total crop failure. In October 2023, the South German SBR Task Force was therefore established in Offenau. Its goal is to bundle and efficiently coordinate all activities and scientific capacities related to experiments, research projects and awareness campaigns on this topic. The SBR Task Force consists of representatives from the associations of southern German sugar beet growers, the Institute for Sugar Beet Research (IfZ) in Göttingen, and Südzucker AG. In addition to basic research projects, numerous practical field trials and SBR model regions have been initiated.

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About the Südzucker Group

Südzucker is a major player in the food industry with its sugar, special products, starch and fruit segments, and Europe's leading ethanol producer with its CropEnergies segment.

In the traditional sugar business, the group is Europe's number one supplier of sugar products, with 21 sugar factories and two refineries, extending from France in the west via Belgium, Germany and Austria, through to Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bosnia, and Moldova in the east. The special products segment, with its consumer-oriented functional ingredients for food and animal feed (BENEÓ), chilled/frozen products (Freiberger) and portion packs (PortionPack Group), operates in dynamic growth markets. Südzucker's CropEnergies segment is Europe's leading producer of renewable ethanol, with production sites in Germany, Belgium, France and Great Britain. Other products in this segment are protein food and animal feed products as well as biogenic carbon dioxide. The starch segment comprises AGRANA's starch and ethanol activities. The group's fruit segment operates globally, is the world market leader for fruit preparations for dairies and is a leading supplier of fruit juice concentrates in Europe.

In 2024/25, the group employed about 19,300 persons and generated revenues of about EUR 9.7 billion.