

UU GMM LCF LCT

MIS:SUGAR

CUBAN SUGAR HARVEST OFF TO SLOW START

HAVANA, DEC 18, REUTER -- CUBA'S SUGAR HARVEST, WITH FORTY SEVEN OF THE ISLANDS 153 MILLS IN OPERATION, HAD GOTTEN OFF TO A DISAPPOINTING START, ACCORDING TO THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER GRANMA.

SUGAR MILLS HAVE BEEN GRINDING AT A NATIONAL AVERAGE OF EIGHTY FOUR PERCENT OF THEIR CAPACITY, +WELL BELOW LAST YEARS AVERAGE DURING THE SAME PERIOD,+ THE NEWSPAPER SAID. THE PRODUCTION GOALS FOR CUBA'S CRUDE OUTPUT ARE BASED ON AN AVERAGE EIGHTY SIX PERCENT UTILIZATION OF THE GRINDING POTENTIAL OF THE MILLS.

THE NEWSPAPER BLAMED THE SHORTFALL ON +BREAKDOWNS AND OPERATIVE INTERRUPTIONS+. IT DID NOT CLARIFY IF THE INTERRUPTIONS WERE CAUSED BY TOO LITTLE CANE ARRIVING AT THE MILLS OR BY MECHANICAL FAILURES WITHIN THE MILLS THEMSELVES.

ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, HAVANA PROVINCES' MILLS ARE GRINDING AT ONLY SIXTY-NINE PERCENT OF THEIR CAPACITY. THE IMPORTANT SUGAR PRODUCING PROVINCE OF LAS TUNAS IS GRINDING AT SEVENTY NINE PERCENT WHILE THREE OTHER MAJOR CRUDE PRODUCING PROVINCES, SANTIAGO DE CUBA, HOLGUIN AND GRANMA ARE SURPASSING THE NORM WITH AN AVERAGE OF MORE THAN EIGHTY-NINE PERCENT.

A SHORTFALL OF RAIN OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS HAS FORCED THE CUBAN SUGAR INDUSTRY TO LOWER ITS CRUDE PRODUCTION EXPECTATIONS FOR THE PRESENT 86-87 HARVEST, SUGAR INDUSTRY SOURCES SAID. HOWEVER, IN LINE WITH THE CUBAN GOVERNMENT'S POLICY OF +SUGAR DISCRETION+ THEY REFUSED TO REVEAL WHAT GOALS HAVE BEEN SET FOR THE PRODUCTION OF CRUDE DURING THE PRESENT CAMPAIGN.

IN HIS CLOSING SPEECH TO THE THIRD COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS JERE, CUBAN PRESIDENT FIDEL CASTRO SAID THAT +THE DROUGHT HAS ALREADY REDUCED SUGAR PRODUCTION BY MORE THAN A MILLION TONNES+ BUT IT WAS UNCLEAR WHETHER HE WAS SPEAKING ABOUT LAST YEARS HARVEST OR THE PRESENT HARVEST WHICH BEGAN LAST MONTH.

CASTRO ALSO SAID THAT +THERE WILL BE VERY LITTLE SUGAR AVAILABLE FOR THE CAPITALIST MARKET IN 1987 BECAUSE WE HAVE COMMITTED OURSELVES TO FULFILLING OUR OBLIGATIONS WITH THE SOCIALIST NATIONS.+

--REUTER/LEM

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