



PR#265-25

## PRESS RELEASE

### **Minister Osmond Martinez Visits Florida Crystals Facilities**

*Belmopan, December 15, 2025.*

Dr. Hon. Osmond Martinez, Minister of State in the Ministry of Economic Transformation, visited the Florida Crystals milling operation facilities in Okeelanta, Florida, on December 11, 2025, hosted by Luis J. Fernandez, President of American Sugar Refining (ASR) Inc.

The purpose of the visit was to understand the many advances and synergies that ASR can bring to the northern sugar industry in Belize. The Minister observed the operations of the sugar mill, which mills approximately 24 kilo metric tons (Kmt) of sugar cane daily during the crop season, as well as ASR's world-leading Agricultural Centre of Excellence (ACE).

Particular focus was given to supporting cane farmers in Belize to improve the productivity, quality, and resilience of their sugar cane for supply to Belize Sugar Industries (BSI). This is a prerequisite for the viability of the northern sugar industry.

The Minister also observed the operations of the Florida Crystals Tissue Culture Lab, which can propagate 10,000 seedlings from each individual sugar cane. ASR has supported the tissue culture operation at the University of Belize, which will initiate the seed propagation of new, more resilient cane varieties developed by BSI in partnership with the West Indian Central Cane Breeding Station in Barbados over the past ten years. These varieties will then be multiplied through the tissue culture process in Florida, which will be able to provide 75,000 seedlings per month for replanting in Belize. This cutting-edge technology will help farmers to rapidly diversify their cane varieties, making the crop more climate-, disease-, and pest-resilient, while significantly improving productivity and farmers' revenue.

In addition, the Minister visited the Florida Crystals biochar facility, which produces a pure carbon product from rice husks which can rejuvenate soil health and reduce reliance on costly fertilizers. BSI plans to develop similar technology in Belize.

Minister Martinez and Mr. Fernandez discussed a road map for the revival of the Northern Belize sugar industry, based on the recent Commission of Inquiry outcomes and ASR's sustainability model, to make it viable and

profitable for all industry stakeholders in the future. This public-private sector partnership will pave the way for future investment and greater efficiencies that support the long-term objectives of the industry.

**Ends**