

Activity sheet

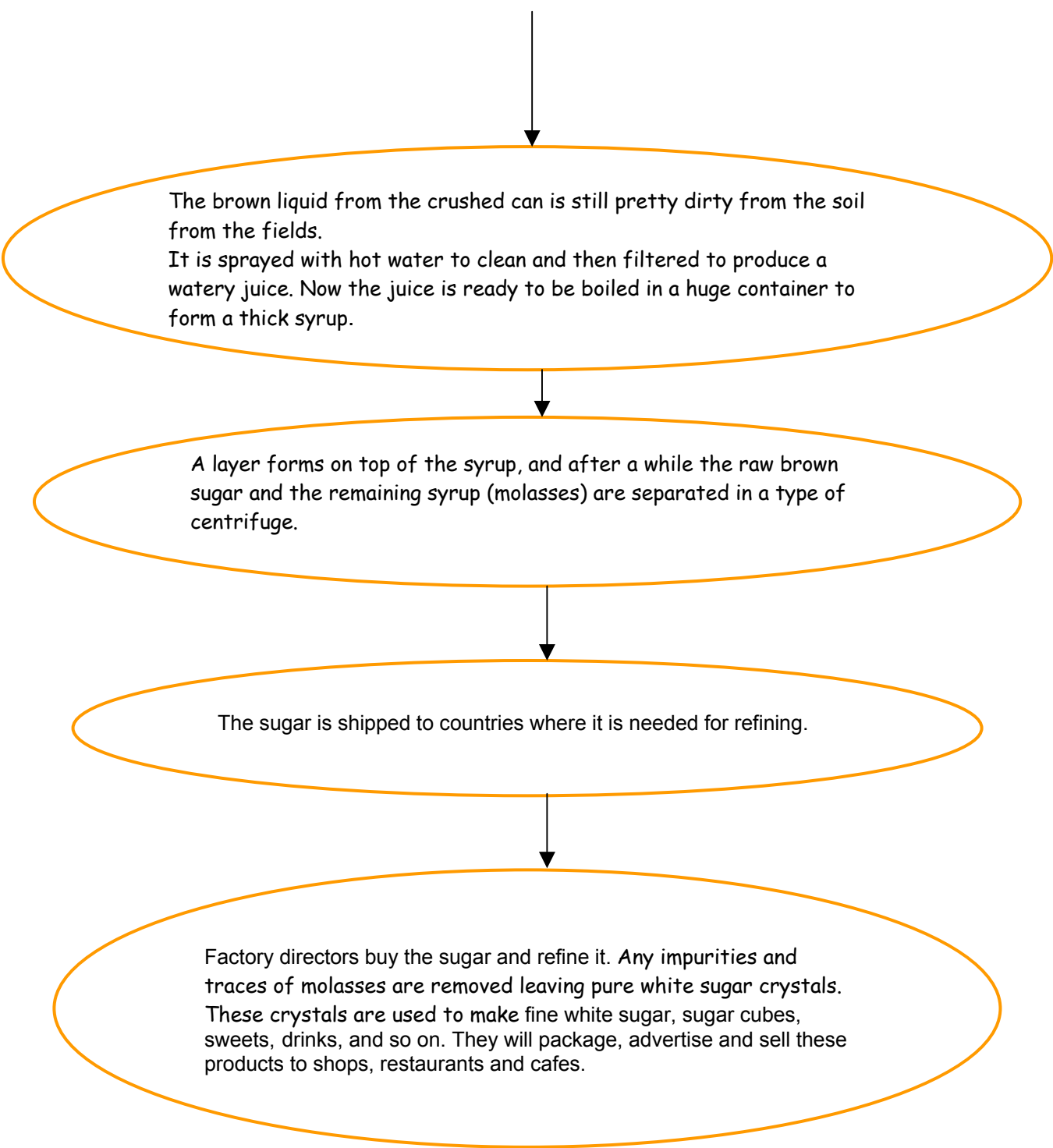
When sugar was just a stick

Growing sugar cane is very hard work. It takes about 11 to 18 months of fertilising and weeding before the cane is ready to be harvested. The cane is then chopped down with large knives at the base. The farmers leave the roots in the ground so that the cane can re-grow in time for the next harvest. Where possible the cane is burned before harvesting to remove dead leaves.

The cane is taken to a local sugar mill or an area where the cane is processed by hand; often by truck or rail but sometimes by cart. This has to be done quickly as the crop soon begins to deteriorate in the warm, damp climate. On average a hectare yields about 50 tonnes of sugar cane, from which seven tonnes of sugar can be extracted.

Sugar cane is similar to bamboo and has a very tough, shiny outer coating which protects the sweet, woody inner fibre. The cane is cut into small pieces and shredded to extract the liquid from the cane. In many factories the cane is crushed between large roller mills: similar to a mangle (wringer) that was used to squeeze the water out of washing 100 years ago.

If there is no sugar mill, workers attach ropes to an ox, which walks round and round to power a machine which in turn presses the raw cane.



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graph TD; A[ ] --> B[The brown liquid from the crushed can is still pretty dirty from the soil from the fields. It is sprayed with hot water to clean and then filtered to produce a watery juice. Now the juice is ready to be boiled in a huge container to form a thick syrup.]; B --> C[A layer forms on top of the syrup, and after a while the raw brown sugar and the remaining syrup (molasses) are separated in a type of centrifuge.]; C --> D[The sugar is shipped to countries where it is needed for refining.]; D --> E[Factory directors buy the sugar and refine it. Any impurities and traces of molasses are removed leaving pure white sugar crystals. These crystals are used to make fine white sugar, sugar cubes, sweets, drinks, and so on. They will package, advertise and sell these products to shops, restaurants and cafes.];
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