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NSP Partners with NREL to Host Pilot Run with Sorghum

The National Sorghum Producers (NSP) toured the U.S. Department of Energy's (DOE) National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) yesterday to witness a pilot test at its facilities. The test showcased NREL's research of three years with bioenergy sorghum and was made possible by the DOE grant obtained through NSP's efforts.

Terry Swanson, Vice Chairman of the NSP Board of Directors and a sorghum producer from Walsh, Colo., said he is pleased with the NREL research because of its potential nationwide impact on the sorghum industry.

"NSP is excited to be working with NREL analyzing the feasibility and sustainability of using sorghum as a biomass source for renewable energy," he said. "Renewable energy will play a critical role in the future of our nation's quest for energy independence, and the work NREL is doing will help the sorghum industry establish itself as a major contributor to that cause."

After working to secure the research dollars, NSP collaborated with NREL to provide almost 100 different sorghum samples for testing, eventually choosing two for pilot testing. The resulting data shows that high biomass forage sorghum demonstrates great potential to fit into cellulosic ethanol conversion. Data is showing that sorghum has a wide range of basic sugars and structure, thus enabling the industry to construct sorghums to meet the needs of multiple biofuel systems.

NREL hosted the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) Board of Directors along with special guests such as Colorado Department of Agriculture Commissioner John Stulp at the pilot test yesterday.

John Ashworth, team leader of partnership and development for NREL, described what the USCP Board and other attendees saw at the pilot run and said the NREL and NSP partnership has been beneficial.

"We provided a tour of the alternative fuels user facility, which is DOE's pilot plant for cellulosic ethanol and processes one ton a day of feedstock," he said. "We've very much enjoyed working with NSP on this project and are very excited to have another feedstock to work with; we have found sorghum to be a good fit."

NREL's early but vital research proves the potential for energy sorghum to enter farm production plans across the U.S. as commercial scale technology becomes available.

NSP is grateful to NREL, DOE and the Colorado Department of Agriculture, including Commissioner Stulp, for all their efforts to further this important work.

NSP represents U.S. sorghum producers. The organization serves as the voice of the sorghum industry coast to coast through legislative representation, regulatory representation and education. To learn more about NSP, visit www.sorghumgrowers.com.