



NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS

# SORGHUM *Grower*

Fall 2011

## Resilient

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Ogallala**

**The Federal Deficit  
& Your Farm**

**NSP Chairman Q&A**

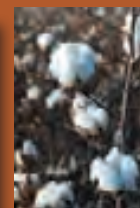
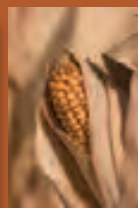
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*Texas sorghum farmer Blake Tregellas says sorghum is the responsible crop for his family's farming operation. Read more about how Tregellas Family Farms utilizes sorghum and no-till as risk management tools in the Texas Panhandle on p. 20.*

*Photo by Lindsay Kennedy*

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# Changing of the Guard



My term as NSP chairman is coming to an end after two years that have passed very quickly. For the NSP staff and board, it has been a busy time full of change, success and growth.

In 2011, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program referendum passed by a large majority. This affirmed our belief as an organization that producers were ready and willing to invest in their industry and that starting a checkoff was the right thing to do. In 2009, after years of effort with Congress and USDA, we successfully changed the crop insurance price election formula for sorghum, giving growers more effective risk management. Through the years, *Sorghum Grower* magazine has solidified itself as a valuable tool for producers and an image builder for the industry as we expand into new spaces like bio-based products. NSP has also invested a great deal of time to sustain and grow sorghum's place in the ethanol industry. We began the industry's first ever federal Political Action Committee and are able to make our voices heard in a vitally important facet of government.

Whether it's working toward consensus on sorghum's role in the Renewable Fuels Standard, following crop insurance or trade legislation, or simply educating new members of Congress about sorghum, there is always something going on. No organization has worked harder for its members than NSP.



The faces at NSP have changed over the past two years—directors and staff have moved on, and new people have joined the effort. Such changes always bring mixed emotions—a little sadness at not seeing the familiar faces of talented people who have become your friends, and excitement about meeting people who bring new skills and enthusiasm to the organization.

I cannot say enough about NSP CEO Tim Lust and the NSP board and staff, both past and present. The staff works tirelessly to keep the board informed and prepared. They spend countless hours, days and late nights on the road and in the office informing and representing the industry.



The board members have selflessly given their time and are always willing to step up to any challenge. The staff and board have made my job as chairman easy and enjoyable. Running this organization has been a group effort. For the most part, being chairman just meant I got the nice chair at the end of the boardroom table! I would not trade the team at NSP with anyone.

I would like to thank the NSP staff and my board for all their help, support and friendship. I would also like to thank my wife Julie and my family for all their help and support. The time I spent with the organization was their time, too, and I could not have done it without their encouragement. Lastly, I would like to thank you, the sorghum growers, for your input and encouragement, and the privilege of serving you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerald Simonsen".

*Gerald Simonsen farms with his family in Ruskin, Neb. He has been a member of the NSP board of directors since 1999, and will now serve as past chairman for the organization. The NSP board of directors and staff would like to thank Gerald for his time and commitment to the National Sorghum Producers and the sorghum industry.*





# Hitting the Hill

## NSP D.C. Fly-In takes sorghum's priorities to legislators

**I**n a two and a half day span in early October, NSP representatives attended 23 total meetings on Capitol Hill with legislators from eight different states. The combined eight states—Texas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, and Michigan—account for more than 4.8 million acres of sorghum planted for grain in 2011, which is 91 percent of the total sorghum planted for grain in the entire United States.

The 23 Hill visits were distributed as follows:

- 11 visits in the Senate
- 6 meetings with Senators
- 5 meetings with Senate staffers
- 12 visits in the House
- 9 meetings with Representatives
- 3 meetings with House staffers

Overall, NSP representatives logged over 120 man-hours in the House and Senate combined. The NSP delegation also met with agriculture committee leaders from both the House and Senate and USDA leadership, including NRCS Chief Dave White and USDA Senior Advisor to the Secretary Brandon Willis. NSP fly-in delegates discussed with legislators the importance of crop insurance, a strong safety net, and energy policy to sorghum growers. See p. 15 for more details on NSP's policy priorities.



House Ag Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK) meets with NSP DC Fly-In participants in October. Photo by Lindsay Kennedy

## Senate Meetings

Debbie Stabenow (D-MI)  
*Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman*

Pat Roberts (R-KS)  
*Senate Agriculture Committee Ranking Member*

Ben Nelson (D-NE)  
Michael Bennett (D-CO)  
Mike Johanns (R-NE)  
*Senate Agriculture Committee*

Jerry Moran (R-KS)  
*Appropriations Committee*

James Inhofe (R-OK)  
*Environment and Public Works Committee*

Mark Udall (D-CO)  
*Energy and Natural Resources Committee*

John Cornyn (R-TX)  
*Budget and Finance Committee*

Tom Coburn (R-OK)  
*Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction*

## House Meetings

Frank Lucas (R-OK)  
*House Ag Committee Chairman*

Collin Peterson (D-MN)  
*House Ag Committee Ranking Member*

Mike Conaway (R-TX)  
Henry Cuellar (D-TX)  
Randy Neugebauer (R-TX)  
Scott Tipton (R-CO)  
Tim Huelskamp (R-KS)  
Jeff Fortenberry (R-NE)  
*House Agriculture Committee*

Adrian Smith (R-NE)  
*Committee on Ways and Means*

Cory Gardner (R-CO)  
*Energy and Commerce Committee*

Blake Farenthold (R-TX)  
*Transportation Committee*

Bill Flores (R-TX)  
*Natural Resources, Budget Committees*

## USDA Meetings

Dave White  
*NRCS Chief*

Brandon Willis  
*USDA Senior Advisor to the Secretary*





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# A FAMILIAR STORY

BY LINDSAY KENNEDY

Wayne Hutchison, like many farmers of the post-World War II and Great Depression era, accounted for every cent and bushel he made on his farm 11 miles south of Spearman, Texas. After he purchased his farm in 1949, Hutchison began keeping a journal, documenting the weather, his planting and harvesting activities, and how his crops and livestock were doing.

A picture from 1951 shows Hutchison, his son John, and his wife Louene as the family harvested their sorghum crop. His journal paints the picture of a relatively normal year on the farm in 1951 but begins showing signs of what was to come.

*July 23, 1951 – Rained one inch on maize (sorghum)...about half up, hasn't rained in five weeks.*

*Sept. 27 – Finished cutting Dwight's maize and started mine. His made 36 to 40 bushels and mine made about 34 bushels per acre on north 88 acres. Weather dry. August planted wheat not doing much.*

*Oct. 4 – Finished cutting all maize, but need some top moisture. 60-day maize beginning to fill.*

*Dec. 11, 1951 – Sold rest of my maize \$2.40 per hundred. 93,000 lbs.*

"That year was pretty fair as far as rain and crops go," said John Hutchison, who is now the county attorney for Hansford County in the Texas Panhandle. The Hutchisons raised sorghum and wheat on their farm, as well as cattle and poultry. John's father Wayne passed away in 1959, but he still owns the same farmland today.

THE DROUGHT THAT HAS GRIPPED TEXAS, KANSAS, OKLAHOMA AND MUCH OF THE SORGHUM BELT THIS YEAR HAS TAKEN A TOLL ON FARMER MORALE. YET, A JOURNAL KEPT BY ONE TEXAS PANHANDLE FARMER DURING THE DEVASTATING DROUGHT OF THE 1950S REMINDS US —

*WE'VE BEEN HERE BEFORE*

PICTURED ABOVE: THE LATE WAYNE HUTCHISON, HIS SON, JOHN, AND HIS WIFE, LOUENE, ON THEIR FARM SOUTH OF SPEARMAN, TEXAS, IN 1951.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN HUTCHISON



# “...NO RAIN IN SIGHT.”

— WAYNE HUTCHISON, 1953

Following a relatively “wet” spring and summer in 2010, much of the Sorghum Belt has found itself in a serious drought in 2011 with little to no moisture since last fall.

“Last year and 2011 are very much the same story as 1951 and 1953,” said John, who was six years old when the sorghum harvest photograph was taken. “One year, you have good rains and good prices, and the next you have complete failure of dryland crops.”

The pages of Hutchison’s journal in 1953 have a different tone than his previous entries two years before as he talks about his crop situation. The relentless heat and drought began to take a toll.

*May 8, 1953 – Hot winds and dry. 92 degrees yesterday and no rain in sight. Wheat going out fast now.*

*May 9, 1953 – 30-40 mph winds. Lots of dust. Hot.*

*May 26, 1953 – Been 100 or more degrees for four days now and no relief in sight.*

*June 23, 1953 – Quit cutting wheat. Not making enough to be worth it. Hot winds and 108 degrees.*

*June 26, 1953 – Cut 30 acres of wheat on section 10. Made about a bushel and a half. That is about all I got on that section this year.*

*July 1, 1953 – June was driest and hottest month ever on record.*

The only things sold off the Hutchison’s farm in 1953 were chickens and eggs.

Six decades later, farmers in the Great Plains and southwestern U.S. are, again, enduring a brutal drought and record heat, reminiscent of the drought of the 1950s, which is now referred to as the “drought of record.”

From 1950 until 1957, low rainfall and prolonged, high temperatures put a stranglehold on Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Kansas, Colorado and Nebraska. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Texas rainfall dropped 40 percent between 1941 and 1951, and by 1953, 75 percent of the state recorded below normal rainfall amounts.

Kansas also experienced severe drought conditions during the 1950s, recording a negative Palmer Drought Severity Index from 1952 until March 1957. Kansas reached a record rainfall low in September 1956. Crop yields in some areas dropped as much as 50 percent.

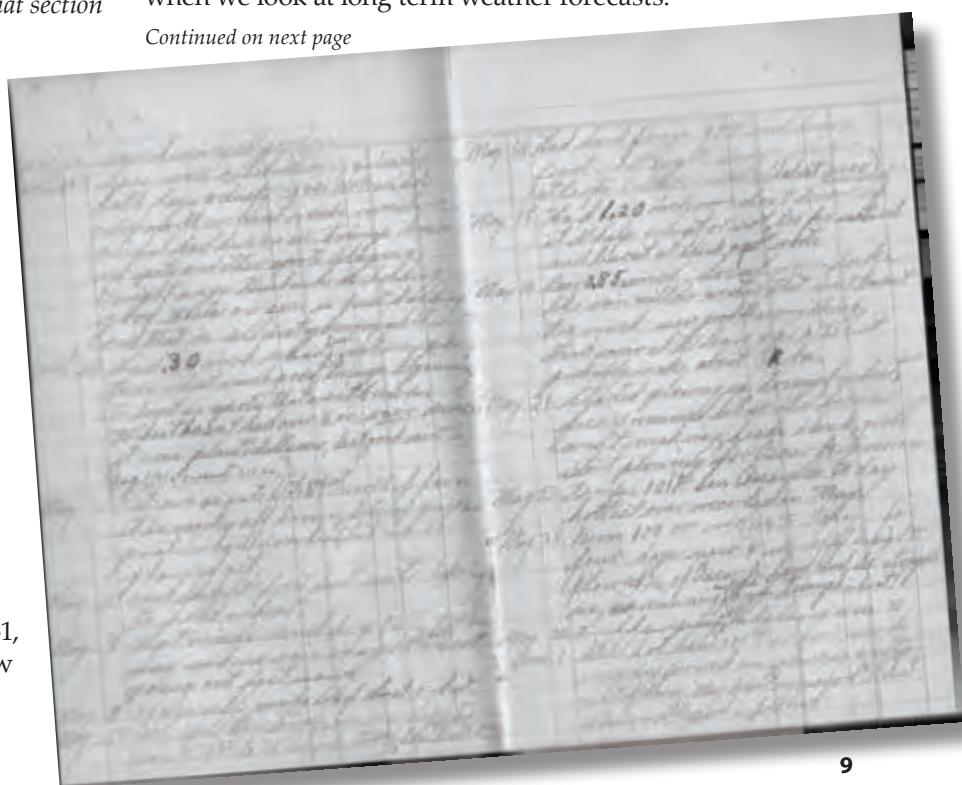
Farmers in present day Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas are hoping history will not repeat itself as the current drought stretches into another year.

John Lipe, service hydrologist at the National Weather Service in Lubbock, Texas, said the last La Niña pattern in 2010/2011 left the region with a dry winter and early spring. Meanwhile, a stubborn jet stream caused excessive severe weather and flooding in other parts of the country, leaving the Southwest with very hot, dry and windy conditions.

“After missing our normal thunderstorm season, the dryness over a very large region worked to allow temperatures to start rising well above climatological averages,” Lipes said. “In a sense, the drought helped contribute to us having our hottest summer on record.”

Lipes said there are some indications the current La Niña pattern may strengthen this fall, but forecasters are currently not expecting as strong of an episode as we saw last winter. Of course, there are many factors that can come into play when we look at long term weather forecasts.

*Continued on next page*



*"DROUGHTS ARE UNLIKE OTHER NATURAL DISASTERS. THEY CREEP IN SLOWLY, WITH NO NEED FOR DRAMATIC SERVICES OF THE RED CROSS, MARTIAL LAW OR THE STATE POLICE. AND IN THE END EVERYBODY LOSES."*

—WALTER PRESCOTT WEBB, 1953

The latest forecast for December through February calls for above normal temperatures in the southern part of the plains this winter, Lipe said.

Agricultural losses due to drought have reached more than \$5 billion in Texas and \$2 billion in both Oklahoma and Kansas. By the end of September, 97 percent of Texas was in either exceptional or extreme drought. The entire state of Oklahoma is currently in at least severe drought, with 66 percent of the state at either the D4 level or exceptional drought, the worst of the drought ratings.

What will it take to get us out of this dry period? Lipe said the rainfall deficits over the region are so great that it is hard to imagine significantly eliminating the drought's impact on lakes and reservoirs in the short term.

"Only time will tell how this drought ends up comparing to the 1950s or other significant droughts, however, this will

likely go down as the driest year on record for the region and a large portion of Texas since records were kept beginning in 1895," Lipe said. "With the current developing La Niña, which typically leads to a drier than normal winter, the likelihood of the drought ending before next spring seems very low."

Perhaps we can draw from the attitudes and perseverance of the generation that weathered the drought of record. While the '50s were tough, the people were tougher.

"I did not sense despair or gloom," Hutchison said, describing the morale of his family and their farming neighbors during the '50s. "They seemed determined to grind it out. You have to remember the young adults of the 1950s had grown up during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl in the 1930s and then went through a world war. These were tough people who were doing without much just one more time." 🌾



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# Q&A *with your new NSP chairman* **TERRY SWANSON** *Walsh, Colorado*

*Southeastern Colorado sorghum farmer, Terry Swanson, took the reins as chairman of the National Sorghum Producers in October. Swanson, who is coming off back-to-back terms as the organization's vice chairman and Legislative Committee chair, has been actively involved with NSP for four years. He and his wife Marcella run their grain and forage sorghum, corn, wheat and cattle operation in Walsh, Colo.*

## **Q. What role does sorghum play on your farm?**

**A.** Sorghum plays an integral role on my farm as we are dryland crop producers in a 14-inch annual rainfall zone. The crop rotations on farms in southeast Colorado depend upon grain sorghum as a critical component. Other crops grown on dryland farms in the area include forage sorghum, wheat, corn and sunflowers. Of all of the choices offered, sorghum is the most water efficient.

## **Q. How has sorghum worked for you as a sustainable, profitable crop?**

**A.** Sorghum competes with other summer season crops very well. While it faces some agronomic challenges (i.e. lack of grass herbicide tolerance) it still remains the best choice when it comes to water efficiency. We use all of the available crops to improve the sustainability of our agronomic system. Sorghum continues to be a low input crop suited well for our arid climate.

## **Q. As a farmer, you're still weathering this drought just like all farmers across the Southwest. How are you dealing with Mother Nature's extremes?**

**A.** In 40 years of agriculture production, I have not weathered a drought such as this one. It is difficult. The extreme situation we are in now presents a challenge. There are several ways that producers overcome these challenges:

Crop insurance has been the primary safety net. Without this tool, the farms in the Southwest will not survive. It is imperative we work hard to maintain this important component of the food production system.

We are all containing costs to the best of our ability. Choosing crops that have lower input costs, such as grain and forage sorghum, have been a part of my plan.

On our particular operation, as it is with most farms in the Southwest, we are diversifying as much as possible by choosing farming practices and projects that are not effected by the drought. Just being where we are makes that a difficult process.

It is important to do something proactive and positive every day. Serving on the NSP board has given me an opportunity to do just that. The worst thing an individual can do is to languish in one's own adversity.

## **Q. How did you first get involved with ag organizations?**

**A.** I was a participant in the Colorado Agricultural Leadership Program in the mid 1980s. That program made an impression upon me to contribute.

## **Q. What is your vision for NSP?**

**A.** NSP has been an organization that has shown its ability to adapt to an ever changing agricultural landscape. That landscape continues to be volatile. It is NSP's job to keep our individual producers and our industry viable. The current grain sorghum producer is very busy and is typically in charge of a diverse ag business. To serve that individual, NSP has to continually provide leadership in the legislative, regulatory and marketing environment. To garner support from all facets of the industry from production to consumption is of vital importance to the viability of the organization.

## **Q. How important is an organization like NSP when you consider the challenges ahead for ag?**

**A.** It is important for all components of the production system to recognize they need an organization like NSP to represent them. NSP can be at the front of the issues. While individuals have a limited ability to garner the appropriate responses to the problems facing the industry, there is strength in numbers.

**Q. How important is it for producers to be involved with the organizations that represent them?**

**A.** Without input from the sorghum producer, the most integral component of the system is being ignored. We cannot sell what we do not produce! This sustained drought is proof positive of that, I (the producer) need an advocate that will ensure we have adequate production to secure our place in the market. If I do not participate in this critical role, no one else will represent my cause.

**Q. How important is it for farmers to make contact with their congressional representation?**

**A.** Congress has an obligation to personally acquaint themselves with their constituents. Constituents must do likewise. Senators and congressional representatives cannot love you anymore than you love yourself, therefore, in order for them to gain an appreciation for our industry and those individuals in it, it is our obligation to introduce ourselves and project our concerns positively. Congress cannot know our perspective if we do not individually share it with them.

**Q. Sweet sorghum has brought a lot of opportunity into the sorghum industry. Discuss how this energy crop fits in with the goals and direction of the sorghum industry and NSP.**

**A.** Sweet sorghum represents the evolving nature of agriculture. A critical component of the demand of all sorghum is renewable fuels. A large part of the growing area would be served well by expanding the production of sweet sorghum. It could prove to be another tool available to southeast U.S. growers to further strengthen their operations through diversity.

**Q. What would you say to a fellow farmer who is interested in getting involved in NSP?**

**A.** NSP is one of the most proactive and positive organizations I have had the pleasure of serving. While our industry is a small one, the organization makes a huge impact on all of agriculture. It is a good place to leverage grassroots effort into a significant impact. 🌾



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# Equity Marketing Alliance Joins E-Member Program

By Lindsay Kennedy

In September, National Sorghum Producers welcomed Equity Marketing Alliance LLC as the latest company to join the NSP E-Member program.

Equity Marketing Alliance, which is headquartered in Enid, Okla., is one of the largest originators of sorghum in Oklahoma and currently operates 68 locations in Oklahoma, Texas and Kansas.

### Expanding opportunity

Tom McCreight, CEO of Equity Marketing Alliance, said his company's partnership with NSP will help them with their producer education and training programs while providing representation in Washington, D.C.

"Partnering with NSP will provide support for our training programs and producer meetings where we discuss sorghum management practices and the agronomic side of growing sorghum," he said.

"We hope to utilize our partnership to develop new uses for sorghum and create more opportunities for the crop."

### A vital replacement

Sorghum is an instrumental part of Equity, McCreight said.

"We feel like grain sorghum is a big piece of our future, especially within our dryland rotation programs," he said. "It will enhance producers' ability to clean up their fields and generate extra income for the farmer."

McCreight said sorghum will continue to play a big role as water tables in the Texas and Oklahoma panhandles become depleted.

"We will look more to dryland crops like sorghum to replace irrigated corn acres in areas where water availability is an issue," he said. "Looking ahead, sorghum is a vital replacement for filling those irrigated corn acres."

### Marketing services

Equity Marketing Alliance does 100 percent of the marketing for all its cooperative members.

"We represent 68 farming communities in three states, and we feel a responsibility to provide marketing education, training and advice to those producers," McCreight said.

"We offer a variety of products that help producers capture the best opportunity possible for their grain."

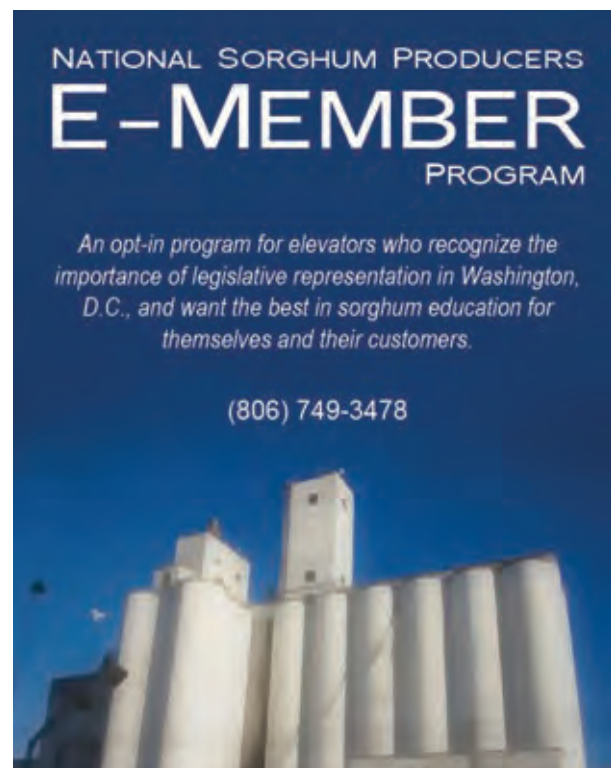
### A lasting impression

After participating in NSP's spring DC Fly-in earlier this year, McCreight said he was impressed with the hard work NSP is doing for sorghum producers and elevators.

"We look forward to working with NSP and are excited about the opportunities we can create together for the industry."

NSP welcomes Equity Marketing Alliance and looks forward to serving their members and representing them in Washington, D.C. 🌾

For more information about the NSP E-Member Program, contact Kelly Riney at [kelly@sorghumgrowers.com](mailto:kelly@sorghumgrowers.com) or 806-749-3478.





# FEDERAL DEFICIT REDUCTION & YOUR FARM

## COMMITTEES, GANGS AND GROUPS

By Lindsay Kennedy

A super committee, a gang of six, a group here, a plan there. You've heard about numerous budget scenarios for the last several months on the evening news, but what do they mean when it comes to sorghum and farm policy? Here, we will explain what has been proposed and what may be on the table with respect to agriculture.

First, we will take a chronological tour through the proposed deficit reduction plans that have recommended major cuts to agriculture.

### *December 2010*

After 10 months of work, the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility, or the Simpson-Bowles group, proposed \$15 billion in cuts to agriculture over 10 years.

### *April 2011*

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan's plan, the Path to Prosperity, proposed almost \$30 billion in cuts to agriculture over the next 10 years with direct payments and crop insurance in the plan's cross hairs.

### *June 2011*

The Biden Group, a group of six lawmakers chaired by Vice President Joe Biden, was charged with finding \$2.5 trillion in budget cuts. The Biden Group proposed \$34 bil-

lion in cuts to agriculture, but negotiations broke down at the last minute.

### *July 2011*

The bipartisan Gang of Six proposed a solution to the U.S. debt ceiling crisis that would cut \$11 billion to agriculture over the next 10 years.

### *August 2011*

The Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction, or the Super Committee, was created by Budget Control Act of 2011 to reduce the deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion before Nov. 23. The committee consists of 12 members of Congress, half from the Senate and half from the House with each delegation equally divided between Democrats and Republicans.

### *September 2011*

President Obama reveals his American Jobs Act, which proposes \$33 billion in future cuts to agriculture, calling for elimination of direct payments (assuming higher enrollment in ACRE as a result), cuts to crop insurance subsidies to both companies and growers, cuts to the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and continuing the widely criticized Supplemental Disaster Assurance Program (SURE) for five years with a price tag of \$8.4 billion.





## October 2011

Senate and House Ag Committee leadership submitted a proposal Oct. 14 to the Super Committee recommending a \$23 billion cut to agriculture over the next 10 years, including \$15 billion from commodities. The proposed cuts would come from commodities, conservation, and nutrition/food stamps. It was then expected that the Senate and House Ag Committees would move very quickly together to craft a farm bill for submission by Nov. 1.

## November 2011

The Super Committee must report to Congress on Nov. 23 with its deficit reduction plan and prepare for an up or down vote.

## December 2011

Congress is due to vote up or down on the full Super Committee package on Dec. 23.

## Then what?

If the Super Committee succeeds in cutting \$1.5 trillion from the federal budget and both the House and Senate approve the plan, the country theoretically gets to move on to other priorities. If the Super Committee recommends any less than \$1.5 trillion in cuts, the balance will be gained from an across-the-board reduction process called sequestration that must total \$1.2 trillion.



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# PROTECTING *your* INTERESTS

National Sorghum Producers believes farm policy designed to support a strong and dynamic U.S. agriculture sector and the production of staple crops is vital. The freedom to farm concept and the counter-cyclical policies that have been in place for more than a decade have served this nation and its farmers well. The direct production flexibility payments in particular have provided critical help to sorghum farmers – offering capital farmers could tailor to their unique needs. We are proud to stand by this farm policy. However, if policymakers decide to abandon this approach in favor of more directed and conditioned assistance, NSP has offered the following priorities:

**1.** We believe in maintaining and even improving crop insurance. Federal crop insurance, which is providing meaningful risk management tools to our producers, is a vital piece of farm policy, and whatever agreement lawmakers eventually reach, the first priority should be “do no harm” to federal crop insurance.

**2.** We believe in building incentives for sorghum production into the farm bill’s Conservation and Energy Titles. The Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels from Section 9005 of the 2008 Farm Bill has had positive effects on sorghum prices, ethanol production and water use in areas around sorghum-based ethanol plants. Additionally, sorghum’s water-sipping characteristics should be applauded and encouraged as the nation faces greater water stress every year.

**3.** Any new counter-cyclical or revenue-based assistance must not discourage diversity or otherwise disincentivize production of sorghum as a drought tolerant, highly efficient cropping alternative.

**4.** As programs become more tailored to risk, providing assistance only in loss situations, payment limits and means tests for producers should be eliminated. ♻️



# Price Reporting Continues, FTAs and More

By Lindsay Kennedy and Jennifer Blackburn

**A**s reported in September, NSP has worked with the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service to continue the current methodology used to calculate national grain sorghum price elections.

Recent severe budget cuts at the state level in Texas led to the loss of four of the six price reporting areas used to arrive at the grain sorghum insurance price election. Without the current methodology, NSP feared the USDA Risk Management Agency would revert to the old methodology in which sorghum ranged from 88 to 95 percent of corn. From a sorghum producer's standpoint, this costs producers money and negatively influences planting decisions.

National grain sorghum price elections for crop insurance have been calculated using a methodology developed by Texas A&M University. This methodology was selected by RMA as a result of NSP's work on the 2008 Farm Bill, which called for RMA to develop a transparent methodology by working with industry experts.

Even after discussions with USDA as late as Aug. 30, NSP was concerned that the price reporting might be dropped. Effective Sept. 1, the AMS office in Amarillo, Texas, is now handling the reporting process with no negative impact on sorghum price elections. NSP would like to thank USDA and other involved parties for working with NSP to resolve this issue.

With AMS now reporting Texas grain bids, the AMS website for state grain reports is still available to access current information. Go to [tinyurl.com/AMSGrainReports](http://tinyurl.com/AMSGrainReports). Texas High Plains

bids can be found in the Texas list of reports and the Texas Gulf Bid is now reported under the Louisiana Gulf bids.

### Congress Passes FTAs

The National Sorghum Producers commended Congress Oct. 14 for ratifying three bilateral trade agreements between the United States and Korea, Columbia and Panama.

The FTAs passed with bipartisan support in both the House and Senate chambers and are being hailed by some as the largest jobs bill of the years. These votes came a little more than a week after the administration sent the package to Congress for consideration.

"We are extremely pleased to see Congress move so quickly to pass these long-standing free trade agreements," said NSP Chairman Terry Swanson of Walsh, Colo. "This is a big step for agriculture and our industry stands to benefit from this opportunity by creating new market access for U.S. sorghum producers.

"The agriculture industry has waited nearly five years for this to happen, and given the state of our struggling national economy, an agreement that is expected to generate more than \$2 billion annually to U.S. farm exports



The FTA agreements are expected to be worth more than \$2 billion a year and 20,000 jobs to U.S. agriculture exports. *Photo courtesy of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program.*

and support nearly 20,000 American jobs just makes sense."

President Obama now must certify the Colombian, South Korean and Panamanian governments have approved their own versions of the agreement. He will then set an implementation date for the phase-out of trade barriers, taxes and tariffs on American products to begin, which is most likely to happen early next year.



## Advanced Biofuel Payments Made

On Sept. 27, USDA announced it would make payments to more than 160 energy producers from 41 states to support and ensure the production and expansion of advanced biofuels.

The payments are authorized under the Bioenergy Program for Advanced Biofuels, under Section 9005 of the 2008 Farm Bill, and includes payments to ethanol plants using sorghum.

NSP has been closely monitoring this process as the program provides strong incentive for the U.S. biofuels industry to use sorghum.

## Big news for Chromatin Inc.

NSP Industry Partner, Chromatin Inc., a supplier of biomass feedstock for energy producers, and Constellation Energy announced in September they have invested in sorghum as a feasible option to generate electricity for two California power plants. Both power plants are jointly owned by Constellation Energy and North American Power Group.

Sorghum is an excellent biomass feedstock because it has high energy

test burns to determine the amount of energy it will be able to generate for the power plants. The energy sorghum currently being grown is 10 to 15 feet tall and reaches maturity very quickly.

Chromatin staggered the planting of these three fields to produce a consistent, steady supply of biomass sorghum for the power plants.

The biomass supplier said its first field of 30 acres near El Centro in the Imperial Valley of California will be ready to harvest in September and October. The end product will be used to supply one of the power plants and the other two fields will be used later.

Daphne Preuss, Chromatin CEO, said the impressive yield of the El Centro crop is an important validation of the advantages of sorghum as a biomass source. Sorghum is expected to have an energy content that is more than 70 percent of coal – roughly equivalent to firewood.

In October, Chromatin was selected by the U.S. Department of Energy for funding to develop energy-rich sorghum.

Chromatin was selected as one of 10 companies to receive an award in the



Chromatin CEO Daphne Preuss and Steve Gross of Constellation Energy inspect a crop of energy sorghum.

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## **“...we plan to accelerate the development of sorghum as a feedstock for power, fuel and chemical producers.”**

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content, uses less than half the water of corn and sugar cane, and can be grown on a variety of land types.

Chromatin is growing three fields, totaling 95 acres, of high energy, biomass sorghum that will be used for

PETRO (Plants Engineered To Replace Oil) program, sponsored by DOE's Advanced Research Projects Agency – Energy. With this award, the company will engineer sweet sorghum to produce high energy molecules in the plant, providing drop-in, low-cost fuel.

“Chromatin expects to receive \$5.7 million from this program, enabling us to deploy our unique technology platforms to develop sorghum varieties that meet specific needs for renewable energy production,” commented Dave Jessen, Chromatin's Chief Technology Officer.

Sorghum's water use efficiency makes it ideal for the production of low-cost transportation fuel and as a high BTU source of biopower.

“By collaborating with academic and industry experts, we plan to accelerate the development of sorghum as a feedstock for power, fuel, and chemical producers.” 





## DROUGHT MAY HAVE IMPACT ON SEED SUPPLY

By Jennifer Blackburn

**E**xtrême heat and winds this summer, coupled with the absence of moisture, have taken their toll on this year's crop, and unfortunately, farmers cannot wash their hands of this historic year just yet. The effects of the drought will be seen long into next year's planting season as the sorghum seed industry has experienced its first major drought related production drop.

The good news is U.S. sorghum seed suppliers did make a crop this year. The bad news is it just was not as much as the industry had hoped for. In addition to the historic drought in the U.S., a spring freeze in Mexico diminished inventory, making seed supplies even tighter.

### **SUPPLY ADEQUATE, JUST NOT OVERLY SUBSTANTIAL**

While a difficult year reduced the amount and quality of seed available, growers still have time and opportunity to get the seed they need to grow the most drought tolerant crop available—sorghum.

Larry Richardson with Richardson Seeds, a NuFarm company based in West Texas, said it's something this business has never seen before.

"No one has ever been through a weather related issue to this extreme in the hybrid seed production industry," said Richardson. "No one really knew what to expect in terms of the overall damage that would be done. We just knew the longer the drought and heat extended, the worse our production would be."

Specific problems caused by the drought this year will make for a tight seed market, Richardson said. Irrigation wells could not pump enough water to keep up with the lack of soil moisture, pollination was not synchronized, seed split after water application will adversely affect germination, and plants aborting their seeds caused a lower seed count.

Richardson said plants were unable to support a 1000-count seed head and started aborting seeds to as low as 300, reaching a level the plant felt it could maintain itself with the given amount of moisture it had.

"I don't care if you're growing corn, cotton, sorghum, or seed," Richardson said. "We must have winter moisture to produce a crop, and we just didn't have it this year."

Forage sorghum seed production has undoubtedly suffered the most this year. Richardson said this is a result of pollination times being out of sync, coupled with the fact most forage sorghum seed acres are produced farther south where there is less irrigation.

### **ORDER YOUR SORGHUM SEED EARLY**

In comparison to forage sorghums, grain sorghum production has suffered as well but it is more variety-specific. There may be planting seed available, but it may not be the hybrid of choice.

Even though supply is expected to be adequate, seed producers still encourage farmers to order their seed early to get what they want.

— — — — —  
**"WHEN YOU COMPARE THE COST OF  
COTTON AND CORN SEED TO SORGHUM,  
YOUR RETURN ON INVESTMENT FOR  
SORGHUM IS STILL A WHOLE LOT BETTER ..."**  
— — — — —

"If a farmer knows they are going to grow sorghum, they should get their order in as quick as possible," said Larry McDowell with Sorghum Partners LLC, located in New Deal, Texas.

"It is important to order the hybrid you want because there will be seed there later to buy, but it may not be the maturity or hybrid desired by the grower."





The push to order sorghum seed early this year is not a salesman's scare tactic, McDowell said.

"This is a realistic situation, and I think most people understand that in light of the challenges faced with the drought this year," he said.

McDowell said even though some growers are aware the sorghum seed shortage is real this year, some growers will still wait until the last minute before planting time to purchase their seed.

"As the old saying goes, the day a farmer gets ready to plant sorghum, he's already got the planter hooked up to the tractor idling on the turn-row. Then, he runs into town to buy his seed."

On the other hand, Rowdy Smith, senior marketing manager for Pioneer Hi-Bred's western region, expects the sorghum seed supply to be sufficient despite this year's harsh growing conditions.

"Pioneer's sorghum supply is estimated to meet or exceed customer demand," he said. "The production risk factor we build in every year is put in place to work through unanticipated fluctuations in demand and environmental challenges such as drought."

### **SORGHUM IS STILL THE BEST CHOICE**

McDowell said the sorghum seed industry has never faced a seed shortage.

"Some companies are 50-60 percent down in production from what they started out to produce, and some were much luckier than that," said McDowell. "Companies will clean everything out of the barn this time and sell every bag they have."

At this point, McDowell said the biggest concern will be how much capital it will take for companies to produce next year's seed crop. Most prices are based on corn futures and will compete with corn prices, creating a large capital investment for companies next year.

— — — — —  
**"THE PRODUCTION RISK FACTOR WE BUILD  
IN EVERY YEAR IS PUT IN PLACE TO WORK  
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SUCH AS DROUGHT."**  
— — — — —

McDowell said this year's seed crop was not only more expensive to produce than the last but production was also lower, leading him to believe sorghum seed prices will rise this year.

"Based on supply and demand, I would say seed prices for this coming year will be quite a bit higher," he said. "But when you compare the cost of cotton and corn seed to sorghum, your return on investment for sorghum is still a whole lot better than cotton, corn or soybeans."

In comparison to other seed prices, McDowell said sorghum is still more economically feasible considering its water saving advantages. Plus, there is a greater likelihood of producing a successful crop in the case of another dry year.

"Growers should not abandon sorghum because it has to do with water," said McDowell. "If we're looking at more years with drought and a guy has limited irrigation already, a crop like sorghum makes sense because it doesn't use near as much water."

McDowell added no one could have predicted extreme lack of rainfall and all the other challenges faced with this year's drought, but the industry will be better for it and will take the time to do the small things in preparation for future disasters.

National Sorghum Producers encourages sorghum growers to contact their seed representatives soon to ensure you get your hybrid of choice in times of tight seed supplies. ♨



# THE RESPONSIBLE CROP

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY KENNEDY





**B**lake Tregellas grew his first sorghum crop before he turned 10 years old—granted it was in a garden in his parents' yard.

"Our yard looked more like a field," said Rocky Tregellas, Blake's dad and farming partner. "I bet it was some of the best irrigated milo in the county."

Today, the 26-year-old is growing sorghum on a slightly larger scale.

Dryland sorghum has been a mainstay for Tregellas Family Farms since the early 1990s. Grown on 2,500 of the farm's 8,600 total acres, sorghum represents the ultimate risk management tool in an area that averages less than 20 inches of rainfall each year.

"Sorghum is the responsible crop for this region," Blake said. "It's consistent and reliable, and works really well in our wheat-sorghum-fallow rotation. It's a large part of our operation."

The Tregellas' farm, located near the Texas Panhandle town of Perryton, is approximately 95 percent dryland. The multiple crop rotation helps balance their risk while bringing in a consistent income.

## "SORGHUM IS THE RESPONSIBLE CROP FOR THIS REGION."

"Crop diversification allows us to spread our risk while getting a second pay period, especially during a year like this when it just hasn't rained."

With sorghum, they can get more bang for their buck.

"We've tried sunflowers and we've played with cotton," he said. "I've had the discussion with some guys that you can make more per acre on cotton in a normal year, but you'll make more per dollar on sorghum. You've got so much less invested in an acre of sorghum when you consider the needed inputs. You're getting more return per dollar even if you don't get more per acre. That's why I prefer to grow sorghum."

### OVERCOMING A TOUGH YEAR

Like other farmers in the Southwest, the Tregellas family is dealing with the record setting drought that has cost Texas farmers and ranchers more than \$5 billion. With only a little over six

inches of rainfall on their farm this year along with prolonged, record setting heat during the summer months, it is a wonder any crop could be alive and well in the northern Texas Panhandle.

"This won't be our best sorghum crop by any means, but it has performed despite the drought," Blake said. Last year, the Tregellas' sorghum averaged right at 100 bushels per acre. This year, Blake said they have done more dust control than farming, yet, they expect sorghum yields to be in the mid 30s after having to dust in most of their crop.

While Mother Nature has thrown them a curve ball this year, the Tregellas' strict rotation methods are likely to help them stay on track for next year, despite the dismal long term forecast of continued dry conditions.

"We'll probably stick to our rotation in the upcoming planting season the way we originally planned," Blake said.



(Above) Rocky and Blake Tregellas, along with their wives and business partners Janet and Sarah, each have their defined roles in the family farm. (Right) Blake shows how the residues in a field of no-till sorghum stalks help maintain soil moisture even during drought.





(Left) Texas Farm swine facilities in the background provide a positive local basis option for the Tregellas' sorghum. (Below) Blake uses on-farm data to help him make informed decisions when it comes to variety and input selection.



"It has brought us this far, so we hope it will take us on through."

Tregellas Family Farms is located in the North Plains Groundwater Conservation District, which currently enforces a pumping limit of 21-inches per acre. While the Tregellas are mostly a dryland operation, other area farmers with irrigated corn may be facing an uphill battle with continued dry weather.

"I think that as this drought progresses we may see producers in this area go more to sorghum," Blake said.

## NO-TILL, FEWER PROBLEMS

Tregellas Family Farms has been 100 percent no-till since 2004.

"It's really amazing when you dig down underneath the crop residue to see how much more soil moisture is maintained in no-till," Blake said. "No-till has been a big benefit to us."

The practice not only helps maintain soil moisture, a precious commodity during times of drought, but it also helps reduce weed pressure.

While they wait for the commercialization of an over-the-top weed and grass control option, applying pre-emergent herbicide to their sorghum has worked well. Plus, the no-till rotation allows them to catch weeds during the fallow and wheat stages. Keeping fields clean in between the wheat and sorghum rotation keeps weed pressure down, while saving as much moisture as possible.

"Weed control is key for us," Blake said.

## ON-FARM RESEARCH

Taking care of production matters, fertilizer and chemical purchases, and crop and seed selection are all part of Blake's role on the farm.

He has also turned the farm into his very own agricultural research lab.

"We're always looking for ways to improve our efficiency and bottom line," he said. "We've done a little on-farm research to compare for ourselves what works the best for our farm and this area."

Blake keeps a notebook in the combine cab to record data that is mea-

sured by the grain cart scales. Following harvest, he enters the field data into a spreadsheet to compare different sorghum varieties, fertilizer treatments and fungicide treatments.

The Tregellas have also mapped their fields over the past several years, which allows them to compare the performance of different varieties by viewing spots in the fields.

"It's not as formal as a university trial, but it is a real world example of what applies to our area."

In recent years, Blake has offered acres to Pioneer, which has conducted sorghum trials on his farm.

"I like to see that [research] in our own backyard because our area gets to find out exactly what works the best here."

Seeding rate also plays a role in yield success, Blake says. After starting with a seeding rate of 18,000 in the early 90s, the Tregellas have upped the rate over the years to prevent any yield drag.

"We typically plant between 22,000 and 24,000 seeds per acre, which has worked



pretty well for us," he said. "Some of the best dryland sorghum I've ever grown was on a seeding rate of 21,000, and that produced a 136.5-bushel yield, which won the 2009 state yield contest. So, if you can yield that much on 21,000 seeds per acre in a good year, in a bad year, why plant much more than that?"

Blake said they can normally get three to five heads per seed on that rate, if not more. He touts the crop's flexibility in the field when it comes to the head-to-seed ratio.

"If you plant conservatively and let the sorghum be flexible instead of forcing it to be thick, it will adjust if it needs to," he said.

Their yield success has garnered several awards from the National Sorghum Producers' Annual Yield and Management Contest, winning first place in the state no-till non-irrigated category five times in the last six years.

## MARKETING OPTIONS

The Tregellas market their sorghum locally, with some going to the Equity elevator and some to Texas Farm, a 33,500-head swine operation that utilizes sorghum in its feeding rations.

"The local markets provide us with better basis options," said Janet Tregellas, who oversees the marketing and accounting side of the family business. She agrees sorghum is a good fit for the region.

"Here, we have to be cognizant of the area's water situation, and in the long term, sorghum just makes more sense." "This is ultimately what I wanted to do."

**"HERE, WE HAVE TO BE COGNIZANT OF THE AREA'S WATER SITUATION, AND IN THE LONG TERM, SORGHUM JUST MAKES MORE SENSE."**

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Tregellas Family Farms is a family affair. Blake and his wife Sarah are equal partners with his parents, Rocky and Janet. Each member of the partnership has specific responsibilities within the family business, but it is fair game when it comes to running equipment during harvest and planting.

"It takes all four of us," said Rocky, who handles production matters alongside Blake while maintaining equipment and farm buildings.

Sarah keeps an eye on regulatory matters, insurance and farm programs, as well as the marketing side of the business with Janet.

"It's a great fit," Rocky said. "We are blessed to have one of the boys come back to the farm. You work for years to put a place together and you want to be able to pass that down."

For Blake, coming back to the farm is a dream come true.

"Ever since I was a little kid, all I wanted to do was farm," said Blake, who merged into the family business in 2009 after running his own custom spraying business for two years.

"While I was in college, I was still wondering if there would be enough opportunity for me to be a part of the family farm, and the further we went along, it just looked like it would make sense for me to come back and be part of the operation.

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# How Sorghum Can Protect the Ogallala

By Jennifer Blackburn

## Water—A transparent, odorless, tasteless liquid.

**T**his precious resource seems simple by definition but is absolutely critical to most living things, and its value to this earth may be most prevalent this year as 2011 has been anything but easy for farmers and ranchers affected by the drought.

The Sorghum Belt covers a large area, and its lifeblood is the Ogallala Aquifer—one of the largest aquifer systems in the world. This water table stretches across South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, New Mexico and Texas, covering approximately 174,000 square miles.

Approximately 95 percent of the water pumped from the Ogallala is used for irrigation. In past droughts, conservationists have seen that when agriculture producers, out of necessity, increased pumpage of water for irrigation to supplement precipitation, it resulted in an increased rate of water level decline.

While the effects from this year's pumping remain to be seen, one thing is certain. Not even the help of irrigation water could save many crops during this tormenting drought.

Gary Harshberger, chairman of the Kansas Water Authority and sorghum farmer from Minneola, Kan., said the past two years have put a lot of strain on the water supply.

"We've had two dry years with very little recharge," said Harshberger. "There has been a lot of pumping and a lot of meters were over pumped, which

has taken its toll on the water supply and affected it in a very dramatic way—this year especially."

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
The Ogalla Aquifer stretches across eight states, covering 174,000 square miles.

Natural recharge to the Ogallala Aquifer occurs primarily through the percolation of precipitation through the soils and underlying sediments to the water table. In areas south of the Canadian River, it is generally recognized that playa lakes are the primary points of most natural recharge. This year, however, has offered little opportunity for recharge with average yearly rainfall levels falling far below normal in many regions.

"As an irrigated and dry-land farmer, I think water is something everyone should be passionate, concerned and knowledgeable about," said Harshberger.

As chairman of the Kansas Water Authority, Harshberger said his responsibilities cover a wide variety of water-related issues outside of irrigation and groundwater, but his primary goal is to ensure the value of water is being utilized toward its best economic return.

"Every drop of water is valuable, and we need to use water wisely in a way that benefits producers and economic growth in our state," he said. "Grain sorghum plays a role in that."

Sorghum has long been touted as a water-sipping crop that is naturally drought tolerant, which was increasingly seen as a result of hybrid vigor in 1956. In fact, sorghum



was introduced to the Great Plains of the U.S. because it is a dependable crop that thrived in arid regions.

A study conducted by Alan Schlegel with the Kansas State University Experiment Station in Tribune, Kan., found sorghum to be a third more water efficient than corn, and growing sorghum often entails less risk and more yield stability.

"Sorghum is less water intensive than corn, hay and other crops we have traditionally been raising," said Harshberger. "As water levels continue to decline, value for sorghum remains and growers can still get economic return with that crop."

Harshberger said as a child, he remembers more grain sorghum being grown on his farm and in the area, but when technological advances like herbicide-tolerant corn came about, growers transitioned their sorghum acres to corn acres. Now, considering the current water situation, he feels that direction will change, and more sorghum acres will be planted next year.

"There were some irrigated circles in our area where corn was put in that didn't make it," said Harshberger. "If people would have put sorghum in there, I believe they would have yielded a good crop."

"In Kansas, we have forgotten this really isn't a corn growing area, and we don't have the proper climate for it," he said. "This year was a harsh reminder of that reality—not that we can't do it, it's just not optimal."

Harshberger said the transition to corn also occurred when the domestic market for sorghum declined, which also af-

"I think it is very important to continue to strive to achieve advanced biofuels status with grain sorghum," said Harshberger. "This is very important not only in Kansas but in the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma, as well, and it will

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**"Water is something everyone should be passionate, concerned and knowledgeable about."**

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increase market demand for sorghum and help those areas save water in the process."

Biofuels policy is not the only thing that can affect water conservation in the Sorghum Belt. Past farm bills have included broad water conservation initiatives that have helped to lay the ground work for more focused programs for future farm policy.

The 2002 Farm Bill contained the Ogallala Initiative to help bring focus to water conservation problems in the critical area of the Sorghum Belt. In the 2008 Farm Bill, that initiative transitioned to the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) under the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) umbrella, and actual dollars were targeted toward water conservation.

Specifically under AWEP, producers are selected by the United States Department of Agriculture Secretary to participate based upon water enhancement activities, which include production of less water-intensive agricultural commodities.



Sorghum fared well compared to corn in many areas during this year's drought. *Photo by Lindsay Kennedy*

ected the price of sorghum. Now that the state of Kansas has nine biofuel facilities that use grain sorghum to make ethanol, demand for sorghum has increased, he said.

This domestic market for sorghum stands to be enhanced significantly if sorghum is included as an advanced biofuel in the Environmental Protection Agency's supplemental rule of the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS2).

In the next farm bill, National Sorghum Producers' goal is to promote increased focus on sorghum and its imperative role in conserving water.

Harshberger said it is important to support all efforts to incentivize or promote ideas to implement crops that will result in less water consumption, like sorghum. 🌾

# SORGHUM SHORTCUTS



## NSP Welcomes Three New Directors to Board

**T**he National Sorghum Producers board of directors elected three new members to its board at its annual August meeting.

Samuel Simmons of Harlingen, Texas, Tom Willis of Liberal, Kan., and Greg Krissek of Wichita, Kan., officially took office as board members Oct. 1, 2011.



*Sam Simmons,  
Harlingen, Texas*

Simmons, a fourth generation South Texas sorghum farmer, brings experienced leadership to the board through his service on numerous cotton boards, including serving as past president of the South Texas Cotton and Grain Producers.

"Sorghum provides a lot of unique opportunities," Simmons said. "I think it's a market that will continue to grow as we find different venues for sorghum."

Willis is CEO of Conestoga Energy Partners LLC in southwestern Kansas and is also a sorghum grower. He brings another perspective to the board, representing an ethanol company that is the largest end user of sorghum in the nation.

Willis is passionate about the future and wellbeing of sorghum. The crop is vital to his company, and he is ready to be a part of an association board that will be a driving force in benefitting and expanding the ethanol industry.

"Being a member of this board provides me with an opportunity to help positively influence



*Tom Willis,  
Liberal, Kansas*

sorghum production," Willis said, "whether it is from an environmental, regulatory or research perspective."



*Greg Krissek,  
Wichita, Kansas*

Krissek, who also comes from the ethanol industry, is the director of government affairs for ICM Inc., in Wichita, Kan.

Krissek has served in leadership roles on multiple boards and has previous involvement with the Kansas Corn and Grain Sorghum Association. His extensive background in legislative, regulatory and government affairs will undoubtedly benefit NSP and its members as agriculture faces

challenges with budget cuts and changing government regulations. He is also very optimistic about sorghum's future role in the biofuels market.

"I see sorghum as one of the bright spots for meeting the biofuels production goals, especially as an advanced biofuel," Krissek said. "I'm excited to serve on the NSP board to help further this opportunity for ag producers and agribusiness."

Simmons, Willis and Krissek will replace NSP Past Chairman Toby Bostwick of Melrose, New Mexico, Brian McCuis-tion of Odem, Texas, and Eric Mork of Wichita, Kan. Each of the three outgoing directors have served on the board for the last three years.

National Sorghum Producers would like to sincerely thank all three gentlemen for their faithful service and commitment to NSP and the sorghum industry. Their leadership has undoubtedly played an integral role in the association's successes in recent years. 🌾





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