



# NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS **SORGHUM** *Grower*

Summer 2011

## Full Steam Ahead

Sorghum's national checkoff is moving forward



**Weather woes plague growers  
across the Sorghum Belt**

**Sorghum goes social**  
*How Twitter is connecting farmers*

**AgManager.Info website  
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## on the cover



*James Born of Booker, Texas, uses his 36-row planter to plant sorghum in June. Prolonged drought in West Texas is presenting serious challenges for farmers, while flooding has caused its own set of issues for other growers.*

*Cover photo by Jennifer Blackburn*

## SORGHUM Grower

Volume 5, Issue 3  
Summer 2011



4201 North Interstate 27  
Lubbock, Texas 79403  
(806) 749-3478  
FAX (806) 749-9002  
www.sorghumgrowers.com

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*Sorghum Grower* is published by the National Sorghum Producers, an organization that represents U.S. sorghum producers and the sorghum industry. NSP is headquartered in Lubbock, Texas, in the heart of the U.S. Sorghum Belt. The organization serves as the voice of the sorghum industry coast to coast through legislative and regulatory representation and education. To subscribe, make address changes, or inquire about membership or advertising, please call (800) 658-9808 or email *Sorghum Grower* editor Lindsay Kennedy at [lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com](mailto:lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com).



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## Halfway through a Long Year

**A**s we reach the halfway point of 2011, we look back at the good and the bad of the first six months in the sorghum industry. From an industry standpoint, the passage of the Sorghum Checkoff was a significant accomplishment that would not have been possible without the support of many producer and industry volunteers who gave their time and energy to support a cause we all believed in.

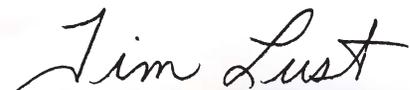
As I write this article on July 20, Lubbock, Texas—the location of the NSP office—has just had its 30th day over 100 degrees this year, surpassing a record set in the middle of the Dust Bowl and Great Depression in 1934. And, we still have plenty of summer left. It has been a tough environment in many places where sorghum is grown just as it has been a tough environment in Washington, D.C.

As several of the articles in this issue of *Sorghum Grower* address, this has not been a year for the faint of heart or for quitters. Looking back at NSP's work in the last 12 months, we have been extremely focused on making sure that grain sorghum and sweet sorghum receives an approved pathway under the Renewable Fuels Standard, which certifies ethanol plants that use sorghum as producers of advanced biofuels.

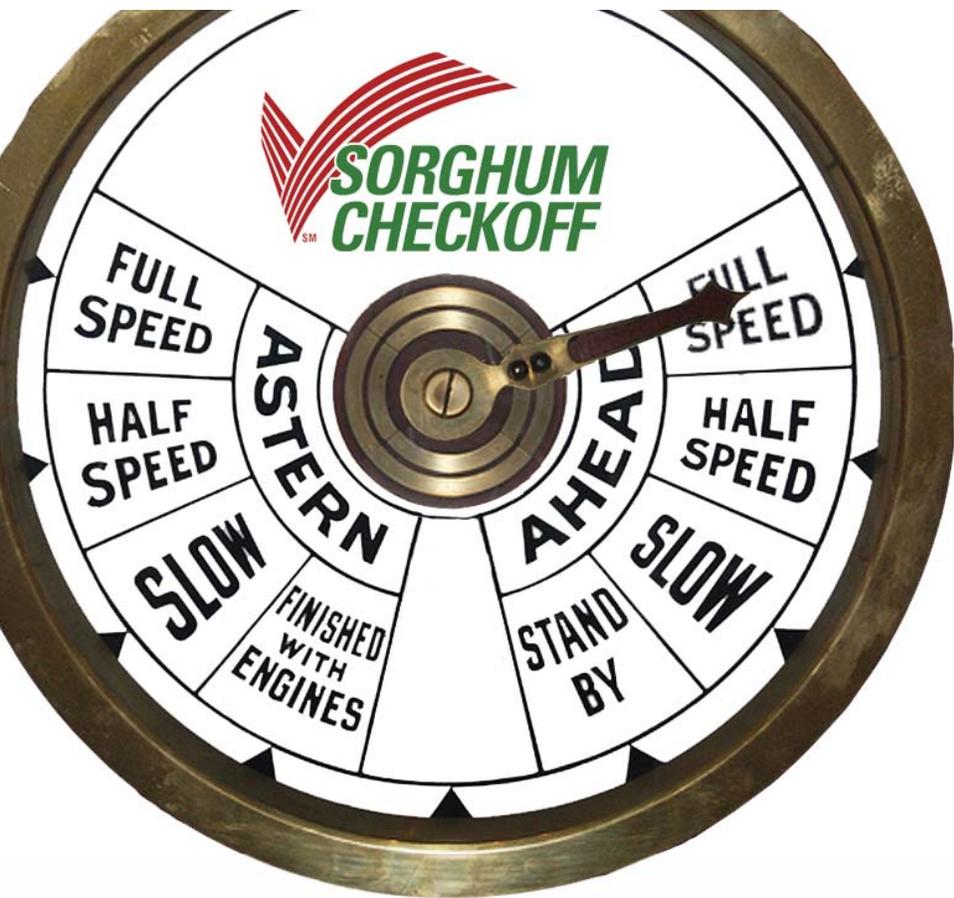
While speed and accuracy are always the goal in life, our experience on the regulatory side of things has taught us that if you cannot have both and you want to win, you better go for accuracy. The past 12 months have proven to be a real challenge in terms of both speed and accuracy as it relates to the goals of getting grain and sweet sorghum approved as advanced biofuels. We have worked tirelessly on the issue, and we have invested a lot of time and resources to make sure the data being used by EPA is the most accurate. We continue to move forward with EPA toward a positive outcome. While the final outcome of both grain and sweet sorghum is still unknown and I can't talk about a lot of the particulars, we know that nothing in the world takes the place of perseverance.

The next half of 2011 will be critical for the sorghum industry from a policy standpoint. Both grain and sweet sorghum will likely have pathways approved in that timeframe, and there is a strong possibility that a farm bill will be written. Needless to say, things are busy around here.

On behalf of the NSP board of directors and staff, we want to thank our farmer members, insurance customers, and ethanol and industry friends for your support in 2011, both financially and from a time standpoint. We cannot represent the industry in Washington, D.C., without your support.



CEO, National Sorghum Producers



After sorghum growers voted to continue the Sorghum Checkoff, the program is moving forward...

# FULL STEAM AHEAD

*By Lindsay Kennedy*

It's not often that an industry has the opportunity to make a lasting impact on its future. When the United Sorghum Checkoff Program was created in 2008, it had one mission: Increase sorghum producer profitability.

Three years later, sorghum farmers have made it clear they were on board with that mission as they voted to continue the checkoff with a majority vote.

## A need and an answer

The preceding decade had not been kind to the sorghum industry. Acres had declined, research dollars were decreasing, and market opportunities were not comparable to other competitive crops. Something needed to change.

In 2006, the National Sorghum Producers board of directors agreed that in order to propel the industry to new heights, it needed a national checkoff program.

"We knew that if we wanted to make a positive change, we had to stop relying on someone else to pick up the tab," said Gerald Simonsen, NSP chairman and Ruskin, Neb., sorghum farmer. "A producer-funded national checkoff program was a key missing piece to sorghum's puzzle."

In 2008, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program was born. With a new board of 13 sorghum farmers with a well-defined vision, the new program set forth to be the change agent for the sorghum industry.

Approval process begins to create a national sorghum checkoff

February 2006



Final order published in Federal Register

May 2008

U.S. Secretary of Ag appoints USCP board of directors

October 2008

First USCP board of directors meeting held in Washington, D.C.

November 2008



November 2007

Proposed order published in Federal Register for public comment

July 2008

Collections begin on national sorghum checkoff assessment



The program was established under the Commodity Research, Promotion and Information Act of 1996, and according to the act, was required to hold a referendum within three years of beginning operations.

76 percent of sorghum growers were in favor of continuing the Sorghum Checkoff and its market development and research efforts.

In essence, the program had three short years to get the ball rolling before sorghum growers got the chance to ultimately decide whether or not the Sorghum Checkoff would continue.

"We believed in the purpose of a national checkoff and knew there was a great need for that kind of stimulus in the sorghum industry."

- Bill Greving, past USCP chairman

"We had a lot to accomplish in a short amount of time," said Sorghum Checkoff past chairman, Bill Greving of Prairie View, Kan. "But, we believed in the purpose of a national checkoff and knew there was a great need for that kind of stimulus in the sorghum industry here in the United States."

Simonsen said the referendum passage was a huge win for the industry and sorghum farmers across the nation.

### The referendum

Three years blew by in a hurry with the checkoff making positive strides in its infancy, including increasing market opportunities, identifying a cold tolerant sorghum germplasm, and proving sorghum's healthy benefits. It was then time for growers to determine the future of the program.

"The NSP board recognized a need five years ago for improvement in the sorghum industry in the areas of market development, research and education," said Simonsen. "We developed a vision, worked with USDA to create the program, and are proud of the results the Sorghum Checkoff has produced in its two short years of operation."

The Sorghum Checkoff referendum was open to farmers who had grown sorghum and paid the assessment between July 1, 2008, and Dec. 31, 2010. Ballots were cast at county Farm Service Agency offices throughout the country from Feb. 1-28.

Barry Evans, a sorghum farmer from Kress, Texas, said he is proud of those who banded together and foresaw the changes required to push the sorghum industry forward. Texas, the second largest sorghum producing state, overwhelmingly supported the continuation of the checkoff with nearly 92 percent of voters in favor.

On April 6, 2011 the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the fate of the Sorghum Checkoff following the month-long referendum in February. Of those who voted,

"Farmers are known to take the initiative and implement the steps necessary to accomplish a goal. This is a prime example of seeing a need and coming together to further our industry," said Evans. "The projects that will be undertaken could never happen with one person, but when we join together, we can achieve a more diversified and profitable industry. Sorghum needed this."

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2009-present

Growing international markets and identifying key market players

2009-present

Sorghum growers vote in referendum

February 2011



March 2009

First research projects approved by board of directors



2009 - present

Research on drought and cold tolerance makes exciting discoveries



April 2011

USDA announces passage of the referendum - Sorghum Checkoff continues

## Moving forward

Like before the referendum, the Sorghum Checkoff is running full steam ahead. In May, the board of directors approved a plan to move the organization to a program-focused structure. The program focus allows the organization to arrange its projects as they relate to three defined priorities: crop improvement, high value markets and renewables.

"These three priority areas pave the road ahead when it comes to how we fund projects," said Bill Kubecka, Sorghum Checkoff chairman from Palacios, Texas. "The board strategically identified these three areas as priorities because they represent what really matters to sorghum farmers.

"At the end of the day, everything we do is with the sorghum farmer in mind. This is their checkoff, and our bottom lines are what really matter."

## Lopez takes the reins

In June, Florentino Lopez was announced as the Sorghum Checkoff's new executive director. Lopez, who previously

"At the end of the day, everything we do is with the sorghum farmer in mind."

- Bill Kubecka, USCP chairman

served the checkoff as marketing director, replaced Dr. Virgil Smail in the leadership position.

Lopez's overall understanding of the sorghum industry and expertise in foreign and domestic sorghum markets make him a valuable asset to the checkoff program. "This is an exciting time in the sorghum industry, and I truly believe this organization will continue to play an important role in moving this industry forward," Lopez said. "I'm excited to step into this new role with the checkoff."

Smail announced his retirement and returned home to Manhattan, Kan., following his tenure with the checkoff.

"Virgil played a vital role in successfully getting the checkoff off the ground and through the referendum," Kubecka said. "We wish him all the best." 🌾

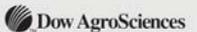


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# Serving up

## S O R G H U M

Illustration by Lindsay Kennedy

**I**f you get this magazine, chances are you've spent your fair share of hours in the fields planting and harvesting sorghum. But, have you *tasted* sorghum yet?

Globally, sorghum is known as a staple human food product. However, the United States is seeing sorghum's food usage on the rise thanks to the healthy gluten-free benefits of sorghum.

In an effort to create more awareness about sorghum's nutritional benefits, a new website has been created to educate consumers about the healthy attributes offered by the grain. The site, [www.HealthySorghum.com](http://www.HealthySorghum.com), contains recipes, nutritional information and a list of sources where sorghum flour can be purchased. Find out what all of the excitement is about, and try out a sorghum recipe today. We think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

### Sorghum Blueberry-Lemon Muffins

Sorghum's light color and mild flavor make it perfect for these breakfast muffins. Use this easy recipe as the basis for other flavor combinations. Try replacing the lemon zest and blueberries with orange zest and dried cranberries – or with a teaspoon of ground cinnamon and raisins. Makes 12 muffins.

#### Dry Ingredients

2 1/3 cups sorghum flour blend  
3/4 cup granulated sugar  
1 tbs baking powder  
1 1/2 tsp xanthan gum  
3/4 tsp salt

#### Wet Ingredients

1 cup milk, at room temperature  
1/3 cup canola oil  
2 large eggs, at room temperature  
1 tbs grated lemon peel  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

#### Add-Ins & Toppings

1 cup fresh blueberries  
1 tbs sugar for sprinkling on muffins

#### Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Generously grease a standard 12-cup, non-stick muffin pan.
2. Whisk the dry ingredients together in a large bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk the wet ingredients thoroughly until smooth.
3. Make a well in the dry ingredients and add wet ingredients. Combine with a spatula until just moistened, and then gently stir in the blueberries. Divide the batter evenly in the pan and sprinkle each muffin with a little sugar.
4. Bake until the muffin tops are lightly browned, approximately 20 to 25 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the center of a muffin comes out clean.

Visit [www.HealthySorghum.com](http://www.HealthySorghum.com) for more sorghum recipes. 🌾

# Feeding Your Pooch Sorghum?

By Chancy Price

**T**he companion animal feed market grosses \$11 billion per year in the United States. Companies who manufacture and sell pet food for dogs, cats and birds are utilizing sorghum's healthy attributes, providing market potential for sorghum growers, specifically in the eastern half of the country.

"The pet food marketplace holds immense potential for the future of

sorghum," said Florentino Lopez, Sorghum Checkoff executive director.

"While this market has been in place for some time, it is rapidly growing, and the Sorghum Checkoff will be helping to see that it continues to grow as it provides another viable market for sorghum producers."

Currently, the checkoff is working to become more familiar with the companion animal industry by connect-

ing sorghum growers, buyers and end users with the right industry leaders who have direct influence on this market sector.

The Sorghum Checkoff hopes to generate relationships that will benefit sorghum growers and provide a sustainable market.

Whether it is the great health benefits sorghum provides to animals or price incentives for growers selling to the market, the increased use of sorghum in pet food is a market opportunity the Sorghum Checkoff is working to better understand and further develop.

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**"I've been selling sorghum to the pet food industry for 12 years, and it hasn't slowed down."**

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### Quality Ingredients

As pet owners become more aware of what they feed their pets, researchers and manufacturers have become more conscious of what ingredients they use in their products.

Virgil Smail, past Sorghum Checkoff executive director, said companies are putting more research into their products to make sure people are feeding their pet quality food.

"Sorghum's antioxidant capacity, overall digestibility, and control of diabetes are all factors that enhance companion animal nutrition," Smail said. "A number of pet food companies are now using research from Kansas State University and the unique attributes of sorghum to formulate a high protein, low glycemic index pet food."

The nutritional value sorghum adds to pet food is significant. Not only is it an excellent alternative to other grains, but it is also gluten-free, high in antioxidants and rich in Vitamin B1, niacin, iron, zinc, di-



etary fiber and Vitamin B2. Research shows using sorghum in pet food has resulted in more consistent blood sugar behavior in dogs, as well.

Premium and generic brand companies, including Iams, Eukanuba, Hills Science Diets and Natural Life Dog Food, are incorporating sorghum into their products.

Dog food, cat food and bird seed all differ slightly in how the sorghum is used. Dog and cat food require sorghum to be cooked and then placed in the pet food to meet a specific nutrient requirement. Bird seed, on the other hand, is not processed and essentially uses the whole grain.

### Utilizing the marketplace

J & J Commodities located in Williamston, N.C., has found market opportunities with companion animal food products.

"I've been selling sorghum to the pet food industry for 12 years, and it hasn't slowed down," said Jason Gibbs, J & J Commodities manager.

The majority of the sorghum produced for the companion animal market comes from local or im-

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**"When I sell my grain [sorghum] during harvest, the premium is often 10 cents per bushel over corn."**

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mediate producers within that area. J & J Commodities is located 100 miles from the nearest pet food manufacturing facility.

Due to the large size of the pet food industry, it is vital for companies to be able to maintain a stable and reliable source of sorghum. At J & J Commodities, the business has consistently expanded and foresees this industry maintaining a sustainable future.

Jimmy Harrison, a sorghum producer from Plymouth, N.C., has been growing sorghum for 40 years.

Harrison plants anywhere from 400-600 acres of sorghum yearly and says it is a crop worth growing.

After the companion animal food market began utilizing sorghum, Harrison had a consistent marketplace for his crop.

"Before, I had to plant my sorghum and hope I had a market for it afterward," said Harrison. "Now, I'm able to receive a return for my grain year after year."

As the marketplace potential for sorghum in companion animal feed increases, so does the added value to producers.

Some producers are benefiting by receiving a premium from mar-



keting their grain sorghum to the companion animal market.

"When I sell my grain [sorghum] during harvest, the premium is often 10 cents per bushel over corn," said Harrison. "If I am able to store the grain for the [pet food company] and move it into the winter months, I can receive a premium anywhere from 30 to 40 cents per bushel over corn."

So, next time you buy a bag of dog food for man's best friend, check the label. It just may have sorghum in it.

Contact the Sorghum Checkoff for more information about marketing sorghum to the pet food industry. 🐾



## Budget, Farm Bill Hang in the Balance

Special guest column by Combest Sell & Associates

*As we write this piece, few if any know exactly how the debt ceiling and deficit reduction talks will turn out.*

Many inside and outside Washington are hoping for a marriage between a plan developed by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) granting the President authority to raise the debt ceiling to avoid default and a plan by the "Gang of Six" to make serious inroads at deficit reduction.

All signs pointed to this kind of deal in late July even though some are pouring cold water on it today. By the time you receive this in your mailbox, you may already know how it all turned out. But, you may not know why it all matters so much to U.S. farm policy.

The big P politics playing out on the debt ceiling and deficit reduction are pretty simple. For their part, many

Democrats see an opening to attack Republicans next fall for trying to cut Medicare so they don't want to go along with a plan to cut that sacrosanct program, let alone also cut Social Security while they are at it. Conversely, many Republicans don't want any deal because they don't want to see a dime of new revenue raised even if it's closing a loophole not raising rates, and they see a deal only helping a Democratic president.

The big P policy implications of this cannot be overstated. Moody's and others have warned that the debt ceiling must be raised to avoid serious economic repercussions in the U.S. and worldwide. And Congress is tied in knots, not able to move any meaningful legislation without some budget blueprint

to guide it. According to polls, most Americans are not impressed and incumbents in both parties may pay a price for inaction.

Meanwhile, the little p policy implications – the implications affecting very small parts of the federal budget – are enormous. With Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, interest on the debt, defense, revenue, and all the big ticket items off the table absent some overarching agreement, small boats like farm policy are apt to get swamped.

We've already seen this play out on the discretionary side of spending, which is the side of



spending requiring annual appropriations. We saw the ax swing twice on agriculture appropriations, once in H.R. 1, wrapping up FY2011 spending, and, again in the FY2012 agriculture appropriations bill. The ax dug deep because there was little else on the table to cut.

And, so it is with the mandatory side of farm policy contained in the farm bill and federal crop insurance. So far, champs of U.S. farm policy, including House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK), the Committee's Ranking Democrat Collin Peterson (D-MN), Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX), Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) Ranking Republican Pat Roberts, as well as Senators Kent Conrad (D-ND) and Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), and others, have been effective in keeping the ax from falling on this side of the farm policy equation.

They've argued that farm policy must take its fair share of cuts alongside the rest of federal spending in a global agreement on the budget and, when the time comes, the policy to achieve those savings must be made by the people with farm policy expertise, namely those members on the agriculture committees.

**“So far, champs of U.S. farm policy... have been effective in keeping the ax from falling on this side of the farm policy equation.”**

Each of these leaders know the importance of getting the nation's fiscal house in order and each of them know what it's going to take in the way of shared sacrifice to make it happen. But, they also know that in the meantime, farm policy, far from being a sacred cow, makes for an excellent scapegoat. To eliminate it altogether won't get you an inch closer to balancing the federal budget, but it makes for a nice talking point, something to point to, although it's clearly activity over real results.

That's why a global budget agreement is so important—for agriculture and every other policy priority to take their lumps and move on with some certainty that a path

forward can be charted without further interruption necessitated by the political and pressures of debt and deficit.

But, there's more to it than even that. With so precious moving these days in Washington relative to legislation that actually clears Congress and is signed into law by the President that poses a problem for a farm bill that is set to expire at the tail end of next year. What's the path forward to getting a bill like this through when other “must pass” bills from appropriations to tax and trade bills to highway bills all pile up in an ash heap at the end of each Congress? By getting an agreement that serves to eliminate deficits, bring down the debt, and control federal spending, a vehicle for a cost effective farm policy is available.

So, perhaps, by the time you open this magazine you will know all the answers to how the big debt ceiling and deficit reduction talks turned out. But, now, you will have even deeper insights into why it mattered so much, to the country and to you.

Here's hoping Congress and the President band together to do the right thing. 🙏

*Combest, Sell & Associates represents the National Sorghum Producers on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The lobby firm's core team consists of former House Agriculture Committee Chairman Larry Combest, Tom Sell, Jeff Harrison and Hannah Lipps.*



House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas (R-OK) has led the charge in protecting the agriculture budget.



# Weather W

## sorghum's resiliency tested

By Katelyn Karney

*The year 2011 has been a year of weather extremes – unrelenting drought in the West and torrential flooding in the East...*

Despite concerns and challenges for farmers in many parts of the Sorghum Belt and across the U.S., there is a bright spot in the heart of America, which happens to generate the bulk of the sorghum crop each year.

Kansas sorghum farmers are continuing with business as usual, despite a somewhat rocky start due to weather in other parts of the Sorghum Belt. Yearly figures for planted sorghum in Kansas rose 6 percent to 2.5 million acres.

Further north in Nebraska where farmers have planted 145,000 acres of sorghum this year, conditions have been seemingly ideal for grain sorghum production this growing season.

Don Bloss of Pawnee City, Neb., said his sorghum was in excellent shape and fields were on track for quality production.

### A resilient crop

In Texas, Mother Nature has not been so kind. The state is well on its way to breaking drought records with many recanting the Dust Bowl days.

The drought has cost farmers and ranchers in the Lone Star State a stifling \$1.5 billion, and is showing no signs of letting up.

Overall, Texas farmers planted 1.6 million acres of sorghum in 2011. Harvest was just starting in northeast Texas in late July while harvest had concluded for farmers in the Coastal Bend region.

"We're very fortunate in the fact that we were one of the few places that got some rain," said Jon Whatley, a sorghum farmer in Odem, Texas.

Yields outpaced projections in some parts of South Texas.

"The sorghum is doing much better than I thought it would," said Dale Murden of Edcouch, Texas. "We've had no meaningful rain since last October, but this crop has been very resilient."

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**"Farmers have a tendency to handle different disasters very well. They always manage to find a way to come back."**

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Oklahoma has also taken a hard hit from the lack of moisture. Throughout the Panhandle, specifically in Cimarron County, planted sorghum is hard to come by. Before the beginning of June, it had been 251 days since substantial rainfall descended upon the area. This figure beats the last recorded dry spell, which occurred in 1934 at the height of the Dust Bowl.

"It's as dry as I have ever seen it," said Jarrod Stewart a sorghum producer and crop insurance agent in Keyes, Okla. "I had antelope in my front yard last week drinking out of the kid's plastic pool."

Stewart said very little sorghum was planted throughout the Panhandle, and approximately 90 percent of produc-

# oes



Drought, dust storms, tornadoes, wildfires and floods have plagued cropland across the country this year. Flood and tornado photos courtesy of Jeff Rutledge, Newport, Ark., sorghum farmer.

ers in the area turned in acres as prevented planting rather than to risk losing more ground cover and potentially add to the number of acres already blowing with no moisture to hold it in place.

He also said without a sorghum crop this year, farmers will be forced to plant wheat, meaning it will be July 2012 before many producers see any sort of income, which could have a detrimental impact on the local economy.

Even though most of Oklahoma is very dry, James Wuerflein, a farmer in Kremlin, says sorghum in the north central part of the state has been holding up well. Rainfall in June provided up to three inches in some areas leaving Wuerflein optimistic about harvest in mid-November. Planted acreage in Oklahoma this year is at 250,000 acres.

## Washed away

On the opposite end of the weather spectrum, flooding has plagued most of Arkansas and southern Missouri where the majority of fields were under water for weeks.

Malcolm Haigwood, a sorghum producer in northeast Arkansas said approximately 24 inches of water flooded the

area in May and June, which made it impossible to plant. Even though the water has dissipated in most areas, farmers may struggle with potentially low yielding crops due to a reduced growing season.

Almost 90 percent of Haigwood's sorghum crop was lost and nearly 13,000 acres of his farmland were unable to be farmed during the flood period. He said 1927 was the last time a flood of this magnitude struck.

"This is a 100-year flood, even though the region is still recovering from disastrous floods in '09 and '10," he said. Even so, Haigwood remained optimistic during the process.

"Farmers have a tendency to handle different disasters very well," Haigwood said. "They always manage to find a way to come back."

Despite sever flooding, Arkansas sorghum acreage is up this year to 100,000 acres from 40,000 acres in 2010.

Well on its way to be a memorable year for the record books, 2011 is sure to be pointed to among the farming community as one of the most significant years in history for extreme weather, testing almanacs and old wives' tales each day. 🌾

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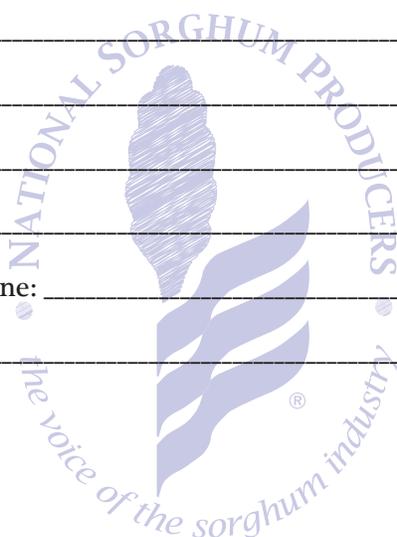
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## Website Offers Useful Decision Tools for Growers

By Matt Splitter

**P**roducers make hundreds, even thousands of decisions every year that affect their farming operation's bottom line.

To help producers with these complex management choices, Kansas State University's Department of Agricultural Economics has provided an online resource of tools called AgManager that can aid in a variety of production agriculture decisions.

From new lease rates, to crop insurance options, to custom rates across a region, AgManager can help along the way.

The AgManager website was started in 2002 when a number of K-State agricultural economics professors combined their individual resource websites into a single, more acces-

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**"I would have to look all over the Internet to find the extent of information that AgManager has in one place."**

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sible all-in-one website. The information on the site ranges from livestock and grain production to crop insurance and even some policy information.

Rich Llewelyn, extension assistant and manager of the AgManager website, says all producers can benefit from the information available.

"The site contains a lot of recent and contemporary information that is relevant to today's farmers," says Llewelyn. "We have a bunch of decision tools that allow producers to enter their individual farm data, including 55 Excel spreadsheets that aid farmers in making important on-farm decisions."

### A one stop shop for resources

Having all of the information in one place is very helpful for Ellinwood, Kan., sorghum farmer Kelly Miller.

"Being able to go to one location to get relevant and accurate information is helpful," says Miller. "I would have to look all over the internet to find the extent of information that AgManager has in one place."

Miller says he uses the AgManager website mostly for up-to-date information.

"I get on mostly to look at the commentary for both the crop and cattle sides," says Miller. "The information pertains to all aspects of my operation."

Jerry Cullop, a sorghum producer from Sterling, Kan., uses AgManager to make important production decisions on his farm.

"Using conventional, minimal, and no-till situations on my farm, I have to make fertilizer decisions based on each practice," says Cullop. "The site has tools that allow me to enter the local price per ton of fertilizer to break out each option by unit of fertilizer."

Cullop says having the flexibility to have different farming practices mixed with the ability to have the information right at his fingertips is a huge benefit to his operation. With irrigated ground on his farm, AgManager has helped him to figure irrigation costs and returns.

"I am able to figure a budget on every crop for my irrigated ground, whether milo, wheat, corn or soybeans, based upon the standards they have set for irrigated land," says Cullop. "I am able to know what return to expect with less uncertainty each year."

Lorraine, Kan., producer Brett Rolfs uses the site to figure rates when he does custom work for other producers.

"Having the ability to find information



about what to charge per practice from across the state makes setting a price easier," says Rolfs. "I can find what the standard rates are and make my decision from there."

Rolfs also says the published fuel and fertilizer forecasts help when making purchasing and contract decisions for the year.

"Being able to look at the forecasts for fuel and fertilizer and evaluating the cost analysis papers help when making on-farm decisions," he said.

### Sorghum farmers benefit

Each section of the website has a distinct purpose. Sorghum farmers can use data provided, along with their farm data, to set a budget per acre for their sorghum crop. The data provided gives calculated estimates on costs for the average farm.

With the complexity of crop insurance, AgManager offers information in relation to grain sorghum. There are also nearly 20 documents relating to crop insurance for 2011 alone. In addition, K-State Agricultural Professor Art

Barnaby discussed the ACRE program and its relationship to sorghum in a document from earlier this summer posted on the AgManager website.

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**"I am able to know what return to expect with less uncertainty each year."**

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A popular place for farmers to visit, the AgManager website has approximately 60,000 views monthly and nearly 2,000 views daily, garnering national recognition.

"We even have legislators that use the website regularly," says Llewelyn. "Sen. Pat Roberts' office calls often to get updates on producer sentiments from across the state."

To find out more information regarding the AgManager website, go to [www.AgManager.info](http://www.AgManager.info). 🌾

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# Twitter

connecting sorghum farmers around the world

By Jennifer Blackburn

*"...we came across the word 'twitter', and it was just perfect. The definition was a short burst of inconsequential information,' and 'chirps from birds'. And that's exactly what the product was." – Jack Dorsey, creator of Twitter.*

**F**ive years later, Twitter has gained popularity worldwide and is estimated to have 200 million users, generating 200 million tweets a day and handling over 1.6 billion search queries per day. Inconsequential though? Many now would argue the opposite of how Twitter landed its name.

Farmers, ranchers, seed dealers, equipment manufacturers, members of Congress, commodity groups—you name it—are using Twitter in the agriculture sector. In 140 characters or less, these individuals are telling the story of agriculture and its importance not only in the U.S., but across the world one tweet at a time.

For one Texas farmer, trying to balance a fast-paced life chasing after two active sons and effectively managing his 5,000 acre farm are often challenging, but with the discovery of Twitter, he described it as a way to compress life.

"My family does much more than we used to," said Jon Whatley, a sorghum farmer from Odem, Texas. "I don't want to be one of those guys who lets technology pass me by. With Twitter, I'm able to keep up."

Whatley said his wife and 14-year-old son drug him to Twitter kicking and screaming as he had the initial impression that Twitter was a waste of time.

"My wife and son would tell me some random factoid to which I would inquire where they received their information," said Whatley. "The answers commonly became, 'Twitter', and I felt behind. I didn't want a 14-year-old to think he was getting ahead of me, so I signed up, and my perception about Twitter has now changed."

Whatley, or @Farmer\_Jon as he is known on Twitter, utilizes this social media tool to tweet information about what is happening on his farm in South Texas that his followers might find interesting.



@Farmer\_Jon tweeted, "#sorghum #harvest11 Coastal Bend at our house."

"If I'm cutting grain sorghum, I will post that information on Twitter because there may be some guy in South Dakota who reads the tweet and just finished planting who may say, 'Man, they're harvesting in South Texas already. Wow.'"

@Farmer\_Jon has not been on Twitter long, and any user knows unless you are a celebrity like Conan O'Brien (@ConanOBrien), garnering followers takes time.

To date, @Farmer\_Jon has only 39 followers, but that number increases with each day. After posting a picture to Twitter of himself harvesting sorghum, @Farmer\_Jon said he attracted six new followers that day, all farmers from different parts of the U.S.



**Jon Whatley**  
@Farmer\_Jon

4th generation farmer,  
conservationist, husband, dad



**Devin Hrdy**  
@Hrdyfarms

Farmer, Custom applicator,  
crop care professional



Not only does @Farmer\_Jon enjoy farmer-to-farmer interaction, but he also finds the information he receives from organizations like the National Sorghum Producers (@SorghumGrowers) to be useful, credible and timely.

"I've had more interaction with NSP in the last four months by following its Twitter feed than I've had in the last five years," said @Farmer\_Jon. "Email inboxes can get full and inundated with junk to wade through, but with Twitter, I've already waded through it."

@Farmer\_Jon has narrowed the information he receives on Twitter by limiting the users he follows to only those he has common interests with, an advantage perceived by most users.

"I don't want to follow someone who tweets 10 times a day," said @Farmer\_Jon, "but I want to follow individuals who post tweets that will lend information that could benefit me and my farming operation."

Devin Hrды, known to his "tweeps" as @Hrдыfarms, is a sorghum producer from El Reno, Okla. He, too, sees the value in information farmers share amongst one another on Twitter and said even his perception about some farming practices has changed.

"I've changed my seeding rate on some crops, depending upon conditions, after talking with other farmers on Twitter," said @Hrдыfarms. "If I have questions about how people in other areas are doing something, like weed control, I can ask the question on Twitter and generally get a pretty quick response."

@Hrдыfarms said he has also had equipment malfunctions before and needed to get in touch with AGCO (@AGCO-corp). Rather than going to the company website, @Hrдыfarms sent his problem directly to @AGCOcorp's Twitter account to which they replied with the appropriate phone number for him to call almost immediately.

@Hrдыfarms began using Twitter after commonly seeing more company advertisements in magazines listing Twitter account usernames. Now, he says it seems like he is checking the social media site for updates almost every half hour, which makes the long days, especially during planting season, pass a little quicker.

The most enjoyable benefit of using Twitter for @Hrдыfarms, aside from timely information, is his ability to build relationships and make connections with farmers from various locations.

"You can follow a broad range of people, and the information you receive is instant and not limited to your area,"

said @Hrдыfarms. "Twitter is an excellent way to communicate with people from all over the world."

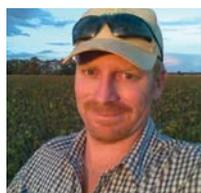
For southern Queensland, Australia, sorghum farmer Brendan Taylor, username @Warraboy, information on Twitter is as close as he can get to understanding how producers from other parts of the world farm.

When U.S. farmers are planting sorghum during the summer, it is winter in Australia, and many farmers there are re picking cotton. He said farmers are just now beginning to plan next year's sorghum acres, and by planting early—the second or third week of September—the potential for higher yields generally increases.



@Warraboy tweeted, "The view out of the front window of my office for the past week #plant11 #agchat0z"

**"I've had more interaction with NSP in the last four months by following its Twitter feed than I've had in the last five years."**



**Brendan Taylor**

@Warraboy

*Agricultural Practitioner (Farmer), Father of 3 girls. Love live music, theatre, singing and dancing, oh and golf! No spare time to do these things though...*



**Tom Tibbits**

@ksfarmboy

*I'm a dirt under my fingernails farmer from Kansas that raises wheat, corn, soybeans, grain sorghum and sunflowers. We also added a small herd of black cows.*

farmer, and I'd love to go to the United States and have a look around someday."

@Warraboy said of the 173 people he is following, he only knows two personally. Many people he has been introduced to via the social media site he learned about through a Twitter forum hosted by the @AgChat Foundation.

The foundation is built from the highly visible "#agchat" community on Twitter. This weekly moderated chat has served as an international meeting place where people in agriculture can discuss difficult issues, tell their farm stories and identify ways to connect with people outside of agriculture. More than 2,000 people from seven countries have participated in #agchat since it started in April 2009, according to the foundation's website.

"This method of communicating is a very good way to keep up with what's going on around the world," said @Warraboy. "Australia has followed the States' lead and created #agchatoz. It operates the same, and people from all over Australia and the States chime in."

Minneapolis, Kan., farmer Tom Tibbits, aka @ksfarmboy, has been an agriculture advocate, or agvocate, on Twitter since 2009 and participates often in #agchat discussions.

Some of @ksfarmboy's followers are specifically interested in the day-to-day activities he shares on Twitter, which has enabled him to attract followers beyond the agriculture spectrum.

"My farm hosted a reporter from a Japanese financial newspaper interested in American farming and what we did on our farm. She flew into our area and visited with my family for over an hour and a half.

"I put information out there that people were looking for, and they didn't want to hear it from the media, but as close to the source as they could get it."

While @ksfarmboy enjoys the ability to advocate using Twitter, he also admits sharing production information amongst farmers can be extremely valuable and a way to generate more farm faces on this popular social media site.

"There is a high percentage of Twitter users in production agriculture compared to other general populations," said @ksfarmboy. "I see a gradual increase in farmers using Twitter and social media in the future because these younger farmers are more apt to understand and craft the technology to be an extension of the social contact with people they desire to have."

twitter



Photos tweeted by @Farmer\_Jon, @Hrdyfarm, @Warraboy and @ksfarmboy while working on their farms.

"This is just a way we can contact people outside the farming community about what we do as farmers to help preserve the way of life as we know it," said @ksfarmboy.

He said through Twitter, users often have more direct access to people than the media, which gives advocates another avenue to reach consumers as opposed to past methods.

"Often the spread of a lie, even if it is a lie, will be accepted as truth the more it is repeated," said @ksfarmboy. "We need to get out there and keep telling our story, so what we are saying will eventually be accepted as truth, particularly when it already is."

@ksfarmboy concedes that tweeting and working simultaneously does take some effort, depending upon how busy his day is, but nevertheless, he finds himself opening the Twitter application on his phone to check for updates, give his opinion or speak his mind.

"I think telling agriculture's story is important not only for my future, but also for the future of my children," said @ksfarmboy. "That's why I spend the time."

If you would like to begin following National Sorghum Producers' Twitter feed, go to [twitter.com/SorghumGrowers](https://twitter.com/SorghumGrowers).

# Don't Forget to Enter NSP Yield Contest!

## Plenty of time left to submit 2011 NSP Yield and Management Contest entries



It's time for sorghum farmers to enter the 2011 NSP Yield and Management Contest to see how your sorghum yields stack up with producers from across the country. Entries are already coming in, but there is still plenty of time left to submit your yielding achievements from the 2011 crop year.

Entry forms must be filled out completely

and postmarked at least 30 days before harvest for "Regular Entry." If you submit an "Express Entry," it must be postmarked at least 10 days before harvest of the contest field.

Harvest rules, a harvest report form and a management information form will be mailed to the contestant as soon as the entry is received. The forms must be completed and in the NSP office no later than December 1, 2011. Awards will be given during the 2012 Commodity Classic in Nashville, Tenn., March 1-3.

To obtain the 2011 NSP Yield and Management Contest entry form and contest rules visit [www.SorghumGrowers.com](http://www.SorghumGrowers.com), or call 806-749-3478.

## Industry information now available in more ways

Are you looking for more web-based information about what is happening in the sorghum industry? Then be sure to follow National Sorghum Producers' weekly blog at [www.nationalsorghumproducers.wordpress.com](http://www.nationalsorghumproducers.wordpress.com).

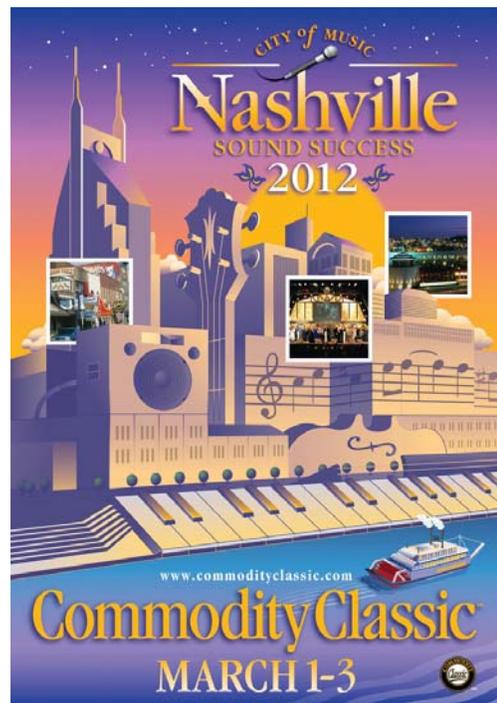
Each week, NSP posts opinion-based, personable pieces with photos about a range of topics from policy, to farm practices, to cooking with sorghum in the kitchen.

NSP continues to strive to cover all things sorghum, and welcomes your opinion. If there is something you would like to see written about in NSP's blog or if you would like to write a guest blog, feel free to contact NSP Communications Coordinator Jennifer Blackburn at [jennifer@sorghumgrowers.com](mailto:jennifer@sorghumgrowers.com).

You can also begin following NSP's Twitter feed as mentioned in the previous article for timely, up-to-date information about what's happening in the sorghum industry by going to [twitter.com/SorghumGrowers](http://twitter.com/SorghumGrowers).

Be sure to "Like" NSP's Facebook page by going to [www.facebook.com/sorghumgrowers](http://www.facebook.com/sorghumgrowers).

Interested, but not sure where to begin? Feel free to call the NSP office at 806-749-3478 and speak to a member of the communications team to help you get started.





# Sweet Sorghum's Future in -Green Chemicals+

By Jennifer Blackburn with Dr. Lee R. Madsen II



**A**s green chemical platforms begin to emerge, sweet sorghum is poised to play an important role in this stimulating market. Sweet sorghum has a unique story to tell and is already showing its vast potential as a viable feedstock in the energy sector. Interest in sweet sorghum is being generated all over the world, compelled by its strong diversity as a crop. Sweet sorghum has a shorter growing period, enabling a longer operating season and compliments sugarcane as it can be processed in the same infrastructure already established by the sugarcane industry.

Dr. Lee R. Madsen II, Analytical Lab Coordinator, has worked as a chemist for 16 years and has spent the last decade studying sugarcane at the Audubon Sugar Institute located in St. Gabriel, La. He is currently expanding his working knowledge of sugarcane into sweet sorghum. His laboratory supports four research groups that are aimed at the discovery of exemplary aspects of sweet sorghum that can be used to produce useful products. Here, he offers his perspective on the green chemicals market and how sweet sorghum belongs now and in the future.

### What does the term green chemical mean to you?

Green chemical means to me that we are using “current” carbon to manufacture a useful product that can benefit society. By “current” I mean that it is not carbon buried in the ground and formed many years ago. “Current” carbon is something, like plants, that is recycling carbon in our current environment and we can tap that potential to manufacture other products.

### What are advantages of using green chemicals?

One advantage is that they are renewable. The other advantage is that a lot of steps to making complex molecules, like pharmaceuticals, are low yielding and use a lot of expensive precursors that add not only environmental stress, but also expense. If we can source a lot of these precursors from bio-based or sugar sources, then we might be able to

circumnavigate a number of steps that are currently present in chemical manufacturing today. But at the moment, green chemicals will cost a little more than their conventional counterparts. In the long run, this investment into green chemicals helps the environment and lowers costs.

### What advantages does sweet sorghum have in supplying sugar to the green chemical process?

It's about the money. Sweet sorghum is a rapid-cycling crop. This would allow us to grow and process an additional crop per year. The value added from fuel-ethanol will be significant, and an extended operational season could allow us to do some new things, such as co-generate electricity. Overall, the expansion of our growing season to include an early crop of sweet sorghum makes sense on both environmental and economic grounds. Another beauty of sweet sorghum is it contains more



aconitic acid, a chemical precursor used to make biodegradable plastic, than sugarcane. If I were to process on a ton-to-ton basis, I would have to process only half as much sweet sorghum as sugarcane to get what I need.

### Is it feasible to begin producing ethanol from sweet sorghum sugar and then transition to green chemicals as a market progresses?

I think ethanol is the first stage because it is what we understand best. And once a platform is set up to actually convert juices into ethanol, then you are going to have the infrastructure required to do a great many things. Once you've got the base infrastructure, the rest of it can fall into place. I think it is a logical first step to produce ethanol, and it is technology we know very well. I think at this point in time, the process has been made turnkey by the Brazilians who have done very well with sugarcane, so if the model works well, we obviously could do the same here.

### When making green chemicals, does the sugar source matter?

It depends on the kind of sugar. In general, the reason we like sorghum is because it does not compete with our sugar allotment. We can only make and sell a certain amount of sugar in our state, in our country, and this is determined by USDA. Sweet sorghum juice cannot be crystallized because the purity is too low (about 50 percent sucrose and 50 percent glucose and fructose). This low purity prevents it from being crystallized, which makes it an excellent fermentation feedstock.

### What is the largest obstacle facing green chemical production?

In my opinion, it is probably supply of feedstock. We are competing against a country like Brazil, which is the size of U.S., and devoted to agriculture. The biggest problem we have is land cycling and having the crops that are going to work in the available climate. Another problem is being able to grow enough sweet sorghum to meet the demand for fuel and green chemicals.

### What would you offer as a solution to the aforementioned challenge?

Right now Audubon is putting together large research and extension programs to develop processes that lower production costs in sugarcane mills as well as improve producers' knowledge and improve sweet sorghum yields in the field. More tons of sweet sorghum at a lower pro-

duction cost coupled with lower processing costs will help the U.S. compete with countries like Brazil.

### Given the current economic climate and reduced investment by universities, what is the willingness of universities to continue to invest in green chemical research?

I think the universities are very willing to participate in green chemical research. In fact, a lot of groups have been doing this research for some time and have encouraging results. I think there's also an opportunity for partnership between public and private groups. If you look at a lot of current arrangements, for example Verenum and BP or Virent Energy Systems and Louisiana State University, you will see that these programs are looking at larger grant opportunities, which require industrial backing. In general, if you cannot demonstrate you have a large company participating in your program, you just cannot compete against those who do. So not only is it promising for those sorts of industry-academic relationships, but I also think it is almost a requirement as we move forward in the future to secure more funding.

### Where do you foresee the future of green chemicals 5-10 years from now?

I would say that you will safely see the production of fuels such as ethanol or butanol via fermentation of juice and cellulose from sweet sorghum. You will see more widespread production of diesel-range organic fuels such as biodiesel via transesterification of vegetable oils and Fischer-Tropsch-type fuels via gasification of biomass. You will see definite growth in fermentative and thermochemical processing for both green chemicals and fuels.

### Specifically outline the advantages of using sweet sorghum vs. other feedstocks:

I think sorghum is an excellent feedstock because it is a rapid cycling crop that can be moved quicker and come closer to meeting feedstock requirements. The other thing is, that because of that, it allows us to get in an early crop, which would be hard to do otherwise. Presently, we see sweet sorghum doing extremely well in Florida, Texas, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and even Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina and Tennessee. There is no reason why it wouldn't do well here in Louisiana, and in fact, we have been looking at making sugar out of sweet sorghum as far back as 100 years ago. It does not make the best sugar, but we can make great chemicals and fuel from sweet sorghum. 🌿

# SORGHUM SHORTCUTS



## Creating Opportunities for Sorghum Overseas

David Thomas of Sorghum Partners in New Deal, Texas, was recently part of a sorghum delegation sponsored by the U.S. Grains Council that traveled to Morocco, Spain and Belgium to continue market development efforts overseas.

“It is important that we as an industry continue to foster these international relationships,” said Thomas, who also serves on the NSP board of directors. “These increased sorghum purchases in Morocco are a clear example of the success we are having in developing markets overseas for sorghum growers in the United States.”

Thomas joined other sorghum industry representatives and growers who met with feed millers, trade groups, port

facilities, poultry and dairy producers, and other sorghum end users in northern Africa and Europe.

The delegation met with European officials at the European Union headquarters in Brussels, Belgium, to ensure the E.U. levy board utilizes appropriate and accurate price data in the calculation of the import levy on sorghum.

To read more about the sorghum mission to northern Africa and Europe, see the Sorghum Checkoff Newsletter insert in this issue of *Sorghum Grower*.

## Share your sorghum recipes with us

As you read on p. 9 in this issue of *Sorghum Grower*, sorghum flour can be used to make healthy, tasty, gluten-free foods.

Do you have a sorghum recipe to share with other sorghum growers? If so, send it to us and we might just print it in the next issue of *Sorghum Grower* magazine.

Send your recipes to [lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com](mailto:lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com) or mail them to:  
National Sorghum Producers  
c/o Lindsay Kennedy, Editor  
4201 N. Interstate 27  
Lubbock, Texas 79403

For more information about sorghum’s nutritional benefits, where to buy sorghum flour, or more great tasting gluten-free sorghum-based recipes, be sure to visit [www.HealthySorghum.com](http://www.HealthySorghum.com).

We think the great taste of sorghum will surprise you! 



NSP Director David Thomas (right) and Kansas farmer Bill Greving (left) joined other sorghum industry representatives and growers in Morocco, Spain and Belgium in July for a sorghum mission sponsored by the U.S. Grains Council. *Photo by Lindsay Kennedy.*



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Pioneer Premium Seed Treatment for sorghum is applied at a Pioneer production facility or by an independent sales representative of Pioneer. Not all sales representatives offer treatment services, and costs and other charges may vary. See your Pioneer sales representative for details.

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