



NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS **SORGHUM** *Grower*

Summer 2012

Maximize Your
Efficiency
with Grain Sorghum

**Grain Sorghum Gets One Step Closer
to Advanced Biofuels Status**

**Nitrogen Management
Yields Dollars**

**Sorghum Silage a Good
Fit for High Plains Dairies**

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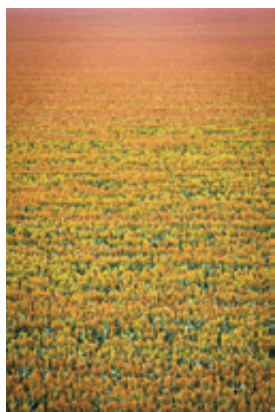
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on the cover



Grain sorghum was maturing and nearing harvest time in the Texas Coastal Bend when this photo was taken in late June. Have harvest or other sorghum production photos? We would love to see them! Send them to lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com, and they just might show up in the next issue of *Sorghum Grower*.

Photo by Lindsay Kennedy.

SORGHUM Grower

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Using Efficiency to Gain Momentum

We talk a lot about grain sorghum's efficiency—it efficiently utilizes water, nutrients and other inputs, helping the farmer to improve his/her bottom line. In fact, we touch on several of those characteristics in this issue of *Sorghum Grower*. From nitrogen management to production practices to the crop's conservation advantages as a biofuel feedstock, sorghum can efficiently utilize inputs and resources to make you a profit.

Like the crop, National Sorghum Producers strives to be as efficient and effective as possible with the resources we have and with our small, but committed, staff. Our motto around the office has long been "do a lot with a little." And we do.

When I look at the sorghum industry, I see momentum coming back in a positive way—maybe not as fast as you or I would like, but there is definitely momentum. As you will read in this issue, we are one step closer to obtaining advanced biofuels status from the EPA. NSP has worked tirelessly for more than 25 months to get this classification for grain sorghum. Achieving advanced biofuels status would not only provide an excellent incentive for ethanol plants to use grain sorghum as a feedstock, but it would also create tremendous opportunities for the farmers growing the crop.

As I sit on an airplane making one more trip back to sorghum country from Washington, D.C., I keep thinking about how things are the same and, in some areas, so different in our industry and organization.

Take farm policy, for example. This is my fourth farm bill with NSP. Each bill has been very different, with challenges and opportunities in each one. After putting in countless man hours and miles on Capitol Hill advocating for the industry, it feels good when sorghum "wins" after a farm bill has been signed into law. And, of course, it is very tough when we know there were missed opportunities in a bill.

This year started out with pretty low expectations by most farm policy followers. Early in the year, the bets on a successful completion to a farm bill in 2012 seemed pretty slim to none. And while it is still too early to predict the final outcome and time line, the Senate passed a bill out of committee and across the floor, and the House now has passed a bill out of committee.

There are many similarities between these two bills, such as their approaches to conservation and crop insurance,

including the new supplemental coverage option (SCO) product. Their language on energy is also similar, although there are big differences in mandatory dollars.

The biggest difference between the Senate and House versions of the bill is Title I. The Senate's version has a shallow loss program with no minimum price support, while the House version has minimum price support and deeper loss requirements.

We have spent countless hours in Washington, D.C. to protect the interests of the sorghum industry. Everything we do as organization is aimed at helping our industry be as efficient and effective as possible to create opportunity and momentum for sorghum.

The continued decline of water resources in the Ogallala Aquifer, state and federal support for research, customers that care about the crop, a seed industry that wants to partner with the producer-funded checkoff to improve genetics, and the EPA's notice of data availability announcement regarding grain sorghum's status as an advanced biofuel are all opportunities for the sorghum industry, and NSP staff have been actively engaged in each of those areas.

However, at the end of the day, we still need resources. The association (NSP) has spent a large number of dollars this year fighting the good fight, and it is paying off. But, your financial contribution is important.

As always, NSP appreciates what you do for the sorghum industry. Help us keep the momentum going if you can. For information on how you can support NSP, visit www.SorghumGrowers.com, or send a check to our office.

We look forward to continually and efficiently serving the sorghum farmers in the future.



Tim Lust

Tim Lust
National Sorghum Producers, CEO

EPA Issues Notice of Data Availability on Grain Sorghum

Crop moves closer to advanced biofuels status under Renewable Fuels Standard

By Lindsay Kennedy

The value of advanced biofuels classification is \$0.75/gallon. In a 40 million gallon ethanol plant, that equates to an additional \$30 million to the plant and its stakeholders.

On May 25, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a notice of data availability (NODA) concerning renewable fuels produced from grain sorghum under the Renewable Fuels Standard (RFS). This was a significant step forward in allowing the domestic production of advanced biofuels from grain sorghum as envisioned in the 2007 Energy Bill.

The EPA's analysis showed grain sorghum, when used to make ethanol at facilities that use natural gas, has a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction of 32 percent.

According to the EPA, when grain sorghum is used to make ethanol at facilities that use biogas digesters in combination with combined heat and power technology, it achieves a lifecycle GHG emissions reduction of 53 percent, qualifying it as an advanced biofuel under the RFS.

Upon being published in the Federal Registrar on June 12, a customary 30-day comment period followed, allowing NSP, ethanol plants, and other interested parties the opportunity to provide input on this important process for the sorghum industry.

NSP provided comments to the EPA before its July 12 deadline while coordinating with our membership.

Comments submitted by NSP to the EPA stated: "This pathway will allow plants to utilize the latest in sustainable technologies to produce advanced ethanol. These plants can truly become the most environmentally friendly plants in the world. In the course of updating these plants to produce advanced ethanol, jobs will be created and rural economies stimulated. This type of economic stimulus is important for rural economies and provides support for rural communities.

"NSP is also supportive of the EPA's assumption that grain sorghum uses slightly less processing energy than corn when made into ethanol using a dry grind process. Furthermore, NSP appreciates the EPA's use of the



If grain sorghum receives advanced biofuels status, it could create competitive market opportunities for sorghum producers. *Photo by Lindsay Kennedy*

data showing distillers grains (DGS) from grain sorghum ethanol plants are sold wet 92 percent of the time. This is an important fact considering the energy consumed by drying DGS."

NSP relayed its support to the EPA of the modeling results as published in the NODA, which show grain sorghum is a sustainable feedstock with grain sorghum's net agriculture GHG number (without land use change) being 3,775 gCO₂e/mmBTU less than corn's value.

The NODA issued by the EPA stated grain sorghum ethanol production could increase to 300 million gallons.

Chris Cogburn, NSP strategic business director, said the market impact of grain sorghum obtaining advanced biofuels status with advanced RIN incentives to plants could mean a shift in the feedstocks used to produce ethanol.

"Ethanol plants currently using a mix of grain sorghum and corn could shift to a higher percentage of grain sorghum, pos-

sibly up to 100 percent," said Cogburn. "NSP will continue working with the EPA in providing information regarding grain sorghum production."

NSP has worked closely with the EPA for more than 25 months to establish a biofuels pathway for grain sorghum-based ethanol in the RFS.

What does this mean to sorghum producers and the American economy? Grain sorghum can provide a sustainable feedstock to produce advanced ethanol.

"We are pleased we are finally to this point in getting a pathway approved for grain sorghum as an advanced biofuel," said NSP Chairman Terry Swanson, a sorghum grower from Walsh, Colo.

"We have not yet crossed the finish line, but this is an important step in the right direction for sorghum. National Sorghum Producers thanks the EPA for their work in moving this process forward." 🍷



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A man with short brown hair, wearing a short-sleeved plaid shirt and khaki pants, stands in a dry, brown field. He is holding a small clump of soil in his hands. In the background, a large center pivot irrigation system with multiple wheels and metal arms extends across the field under a clear blue sky.

REDUCED-TILL, REDUCED RISK

Texas Panhandle farmer benefits from sorghum, reduced-till system

Story and photos by Lindsay Kennedy

I REALLY THINK SORGHUM IS THE WAY TO GO.

Wade Schueler doesn't have your average nine to five job. The 35-year-old farmer and banker from Friona, Texas, makes a living by being diversified.

"I grew up in the country and never thought I'd live in town and work at a bank," said Wade. Since February, he has worked full-time as a farm advisor for Friona State Bank to supplement his 480-acre farming operation.

Wade has been farming for the last 10 years. After graduating from West Texas A&M University in Canyon with a plant and soils sciences degree in 2000, he began driving a truck and farmed with his two brothers. Although his brothers eventually took the livestock route, Wade wanted to strictly farm. So, in 2007 he began running his own operation, including a custom spray service.

Although his day job at the bank now finds him behind a desk, there is certainly plenty of dirt underneath this West Texan's fingernails.

"You have to be diversified," he said. "Come 4:00 p.m., I know what I have to do next. I have some long days, but that's all right for now. I have always thought if you're not having fun, you need to change what you're doing."

Going against the grain

Wade's farm sits west of Friona, near the Texas-New Mexico state line in Parmer County—an area that saw little, if any, rainfall during the historic drought of 2011. Last year was the first time Wade did not grow corn and was the first year he gave grain sorghum a try.

"People around here thought I was crazy," Wade said of his decision to not plant corn last year, despite the crop's high prices. "It was one of the biggest blessings ever. Conditions got so dry that not planting corn was a good idea. We didn't have enough water to grow corn."

Irrigated grain sorghum coupled with reduced and no-till farming techniques proved to be a winning combination for Wade. His decision to plant water-sipping grain

sorghum last year ended up earning him third place in the 2011 NSP Yield and Management Contest in the state reduced-till, irrigated category with Channel 5C35.

"The drought helped our area realize that maybe we don't need to grow so much corn up here," said Wade. For him, the choice between 8,000-pound sorghum yields versus 5,000-pound corn yields is an easy one. "I really think sorghum is the way to go."

Although the weather pattern showed signs of shifting with occasional pop-up showers in the Panhandle this spring and summer, last year's devastatingly dry conditions have left many farmers with less than desirable soil moisture levels. Any moisture received from brief rains is often countered by the high winds that follow. As of mid-July, Wade's farm had still only received about 1.30 inches of rainfall in 2012.

"We're really getting dry in a hurry," he said, "which is all the more reason to grow milo."

Preserving moisture, reducing weeds

No-till and reduced-till practices have helped preserve some of the precious soil moisture as the summer's scorching temperatures rise and rain showers become few and far between.

"I try to leave as much residue as I can," he said. "More and more farmers in this area are starting to do no-till."

He said the residue left behind from no-till helps in catching moisture from snow and rainfall during the fall and winter months while shading growing plants during the spring and summer.

It also helps reduce weed competition.

"When you don't have as much ground exposed, the weed pressure just isn't as bad," he said. "You need bare ground for a weed to get started, and the residue and mulch left in between rows really helps to reduce weed problems."



Wade discusses full season grain sorghum varieties before planting time with his Channel seed dealer.

As another measure of weed control, Wade sprays his fields pre-plant to kill off any lingering weeds. He then applies pre-emergent herbicide following planting and follows up with a 2,4-D application.

An option that works

Last year, Wade planted grain sorghum no-till behind wheat – a double crop system that worked well for him, yielding 105 bushels of grain per acre.

“I think double crop is the smart thing to do,” he said. The drought proved too much for his winter wheat last year, which only yielded 12 bushels per acre under irrigation. However, the stubble left behind helped protect the following crop.

Even though some producers have been reluctant to change, Wade says he believes the combination of grain sorghum and no-till or reduced tillage practices make sense in the area.

“With the water situation we have up here, we’re seeing more and more people starting to use no-till and reduced till, and we’re seeing more strip-till equipment around here as part of dealer inventories.”

For Wade, the switch to the new production practice has been eye-opening.

“It just goes to show your farming technique determines your success,” he said. “There have been a lot of people asking what I have been doing different, and it’s got a lot of people interested in knowing what’s going on.”

This year, Wade planted a full season Dekalb grain sorghum variety strip-till into a wheat cover crop in early June. He also planted 60 acres of sorghum silage with conventional tillage that is contracted to a local feedyard.

Because of the crop’s resiliency and the abundance of feedyards in the Texas Panhandle, Wade believes grain sorghum has potential.

“Grain sorghum could be a big deal here if producers managed it like a major crop. We need to look at grain sorghum hard for this area, but we need markets. We know grain sorghum’s feed value is as good as corn. Studies show that it feeds out as well as corn. Supply is also an issue, but I think we can get the acres if we get the demand.”



Aside from grain yields, Wade also utilized sorghum stalks for hay production last year when hay in the drought-stricken Southwest was scarce.

Sorghum's Water-Sipping Efficiency

UNL water study compares water use efficiency of sorghum, corn and soybeans

By Robert Jones

Grain sorghum has long been touted as a water-sipping crop, but as new drought-tolerant corn hybrids enter the market, how will sorghum stack up on water use efficiency?

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Educator Jenny Rees recently completed a three-year study comparing water-sipping sorghum with a dryland corn hybrid and soybean variety in three separate trials from 2009 to 2011.

“Here in Nebraska we’ve seen a lot of acres of sorghum lost as farmers plant dryland corn hybrids,” Rees said. “Our goal with this study was to compare the water use efficiency of sorghum, corn and soybeans.”

Water use efficiency is measured by the amount of harvestable product produced per unit of water used by the plant, and is one of the most important traits controlling plant productivity in dry environments. Sorghum’s water use efficiency could give producers the ability to harvest productive crop yields with less water.

Of the three crops tested, results from Rees’ study showed sorghum is the more efficient plant overall when it comes to water use.

During the study’s three years of data collection, sorghum averaged a crop water use efficiency (CWUE) of 6.4 bushels per inch, compared to 5.6 bushels per inch used by the dryland corn hybrid and 2.4 used by soybeans. Outperforming corn and soybeans in water use efficiency and yield, sorghum proved still deserving of its title as a “water-sipping” crop.

These results came as no surprise to Rees, who said she hopes producers will see that sorghum is still a very good option.

“Regarding drought tolerance, sorghum is an excellent crop,” Rees said. “If you look at all the time and money the industry has put into making crops more water use efficient, I’d say this is huge for growers all over the country.”

In her study, Rees grew the three crops side-by-side under dryland conditions

with the only water application coming from natural rainfall – 28 inches per year average for Clay County, Neb. Watermark sensors were installed at one-foot incremental depths up to four feet for each crop, and readings were recorded every hour.

Planted in early May, each crop took between four and six months to fully mature. During this period, data was recorded for rainfall, and soil moisture depletion. Measuring input and output alone, this data can then be used to calculate each crop’s evapotranspiration.

Evapotranspiration is a term used to describe the sum of evaporation and plant transpiration from the earth’s surface to the atmosphere. Evaporation is the movement of water to the air from sources such as soil, canopy interception, and water bodies, while transpiration represents the movement of water within a plant and the subsequent loss of water as vapor through its leaves. Evapotranspiration is the combination of the two processes, and is an important part of the water cycle. 🌱

Crop Water Use Efficiency 2009-2011

	2011 Yield (bu/ac)	2011 CWUE (bu/in)	2010 Yield (bu/ac)	2010 CWUE (bu/in)	2009 Yield (bu/ac)	2009 CWUE (bu/in)	3-Year Avg. Yield (bu/ac)	3-Year Avg. CWUE (bu/in)
Sorghum	138.9	8.0	118.0	5.5	77.4	5.6	111.4	6.4
Corn	127.2	5.8	101.2	4.3	97.5	6.7	108.6	5.6
Soybeans	61.3	2.9	44.0	2.0	33.4	2.4	46.2	2.4

Source: University of Nebraska–Lincoln

FARM BILL 2012...

House

Passed House Agriculture Committee Markup July 12, 2012.



BIG PICTURE NUMBERS

557 pages

\$35 billion in savings

\$26 billion cut to nutrition

SAFETY NET

RLC (Revenue
Loss
Coverage) or PLC (Price
Loss
Coverage)

Sorghum farmers will have the option to choose a program that works best for their farm. These options apply to planted acres up to base acres. PLC provides deep loss price protection while RLC provides a safety net based on both yield and price.

WHAT'S THE SAME

Sweet Sorghum & Biomass Insurance
Conservation Title
Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO)
Enterprise Units for Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Sorghum

WHAT IT MEANS FOR SORGHUM

The Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) provides sorghum farmers another risk management tool. While being implemented differently in the bills, the key compo-

nents of the program are the same, and NSP analysis shows it being a key part of the new safety net. The ability to add PLC (House bill) provides a multi-year

the differences between the bills

SENATE

Passed Senate Floor June 21, 2012.



1,010 pages

\$23 billion in savings

\$4 billion cut to nutrition

ARC (Agriculture Risk Coverage)

This program is the much publicized shallow-loss program and tends to support certain regions more than others. Farmers are given the choice of individual or county coverage. National Sorghum Producers analysis shows this program offers less than \$2.10 per acre of protection for most sorghum producers.

Sweet Sorghum & Biomass Insurance
Conservation Title
Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO)
Enterprise Units for Irrigated and Non-Irrigated Sorghum

deep price decline protection mechanism, which is not in the Senate bill. NSP is encouraged that sweet and biomass sorghum language was included in both

bills and that conservation remains to be an important component to this industry's sustainable future. At press time, this is where each bill stood. Final hurdles remain,

but NSP continues to work for the sorghum farmer. In the future, we hope to provide more answers and outline the next five-year farm bill.

URBANized



Growing cities create challenges for rural America and farming

by Shelee Padgett

Collin County, Texas, one of the nation's fastest growing areas, boasts a unique blend of new-edge urban and traditional rural lifestyle—a little bit country and a little bit cosmopolitan—located in the heart of North Texas.

Once dubbed the Metroplex's country cousin, Collin County is looking less and less rural, replacing its grain sorghum and wheat fields with neighborhoods and strip malls. One family that has experienced the growth of the area is Bill and Julia Stelzer. Together with their son Chris, they operate a grain sorghum and wheat farm in a Texas county that currently welcomes approximately 75 new residents every day.



According to the Collin County Chamber of Commerce, eight of the 10 fastest-growing cities in North Texas are located within the county the Stelzer's call home.

Population statistics for the area were not this daunting when Bill started farming with his father in 1971. The small farming community of Celina, Texas, where Bill was born and raised and currently lives, was a couple hours north of Dallas and many of the families made a living from farming. Today, Bill describes Celina as a bedroom community, where the majority of residents commute to Dallas or Fort Worth for work or work from home a couple days a week.

Unlike the days gone by, today only six to eight farmers farm the 8,400 grain sorghum acres in Collin County. On the western side of the county, Bill says, only two farmers farm the crop.

While many of the farms have been consumed by the expanding metro area, the Stelzer's operation is home to something far less typical – they have actually expanded in the last 15 years. In fact, according to Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, dryland crop acres have declined by 25 percent since 1997 in Collin County.

"We have been very fortunate with our timing and the fact that the operation has grown," says Bill. "However, don't get me wrong, we face a handful of challenges."

The majority of his fields are all within 4.5 miles of Bill's home in Celina. While much of the agricultural land is being converted to development, Bill has very few fields under 30 acres. According to Bill, most of his fields are 60-220 acres, with a handful of them between 400 and 600 acres.

One positive aspect of farming in an urban area, Bill notes, is that not a harvest goes by without a young couple stopping by his farm to ask if their children can ride in the combine.

"The majority of city dwellers are curious about farming," Bill said. "Unfortunately, there is a very small percentage that do understand (agriculture) or want to understand, which is an issue."

Bill is not immune to many of the challenges other producers face. However, with more than 1.4 million people who call themselves his neighbor, he has a few additional hurdles.

"I have to be extremely careful with the use of herbicide and pesticide given the growth of the population," he said. "Aerial application is very tricky at some of our farms. There are some fields where we cannot apply chemicals with that method. The chance of drift is just too risky."

While the family has a 30,000-bushel on-farm storage capacity, they market a portion of their grain sorghum crop to Attebury Grain LLC in Saginaw, Texas. That means they must haul semi loads of their crop through downtown Fort Worth.

While Bill does not have his commercial driver's license (CDL), his son Chris does.



"Unfortunately, farmers cannot afford land in Collin County anymore," Bill said. "Developers have bid the land in the area to as much as \$15,000 an acre. You cannot pencil a profit from that if you are farming the land."

While the Stelzers cash rent 60 percent of their land, a couple of Bill's neighbors are paid to farm land closer to Dallas.

"They also receive all the revenue from the crops," he said. "Landlords keep this arrangement so they can keep the agricultural tax exemptions on the land."

"Today, the market is not there but the land investors are waiting, and one day there will be a market," said Bill, who has much of his land along a toll road. "Much of the land is owned by investors and developers just waiting for the right time to sell."

There is no doubt agricultural land is a vanishing commodity in North Texas. According to accumulated data from Texas County Appraisal Districts, over 269,000 acres of farms and ranches in the Metroplex were converted to other uses from 1997 to 2007. Over 45 percent of this land conversion was related to growth and development associated with population expansion in the Metroplex's three highest growth counties— Rockwall, Collin and Denton. During this period, 121,821 acres were lost from the agricultural land base north and east of the greater Dallas area.

"While I believe in the American farmer and our ability to meet the demand for a growing population," Bill said, "I also believe in my 40-year-old son's lifetime he will have to make a decision, because there will not be enough farmland in this area to make a living farming."

"During harvest, we can cut eight to 10 semi loads a day, but we usually only send five trucks to Fort Worth each day," Bill said. "The liability is too great. We will not travel with our equipment to certain farms before 8:00 a.m. or after 6:00 p.m., and we especially will not leave for Attebury after 3:30 p.m. Ideally we leave everything (semis and grain cart) full to start the next day."

While Collin County is very much a suburb of Dallas, it is just rural enough to attract bicycle and motorcycle enthusiasts.

"Semis and cars are not nearly as big of an issue as bikes," says Bill. "Many of our farm-to-market roads do not have shoulders, and it is impossible to maneuver farming equipment around a cyclist. It is extremely dangerous and something we have to use extra caution in dealing with as we move from farm to farm."

Along the lines of liability, experienced labor has been and will always be an issue for Bill's farm.

"I do not have a qualified pool of applicants in the area, and it is hard to hire someone with no agricultural background and allow them to run a \$200,000-plus piece of equipment in a highly populated area," he said. Currently Chris and Bill employ a full-time person and occasionally hire part-time help.

There has been a 223 percent increase in appraised market value for land in the Metroplex region over the last 10 years. In 2007, the average appraised market value of farms, ranches and forestlands in Texas was \$1,196 per acre. However, in the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex, the average appraised market value was \$6,985 per acre, according to Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources.



THE N GAME

Nitrogen fertilizer management yields dollars

By Justin Weinheimer, Sorghum Checkoff Crop Improvement Director

Fertility management is a crucial agronomic and economic component to any farming system, regardless of what crop you are growing.

Farmers continually struggle with the decision of how much fertilizer to apply, which can have short and long-term impacts to a farm's bottom line.

Complicating this decision are record high farm prices for fertilizer, which can squeeze the narrow margins farmers already face. Fertilizer prices have been trending upward for nearly 15 years.

Fertility expenditures can be one of the largest cash inputs into a sorghum crop. Because this can translate into

bottom line profits, improving fertilizer efficiency can have a large payback to a producer.

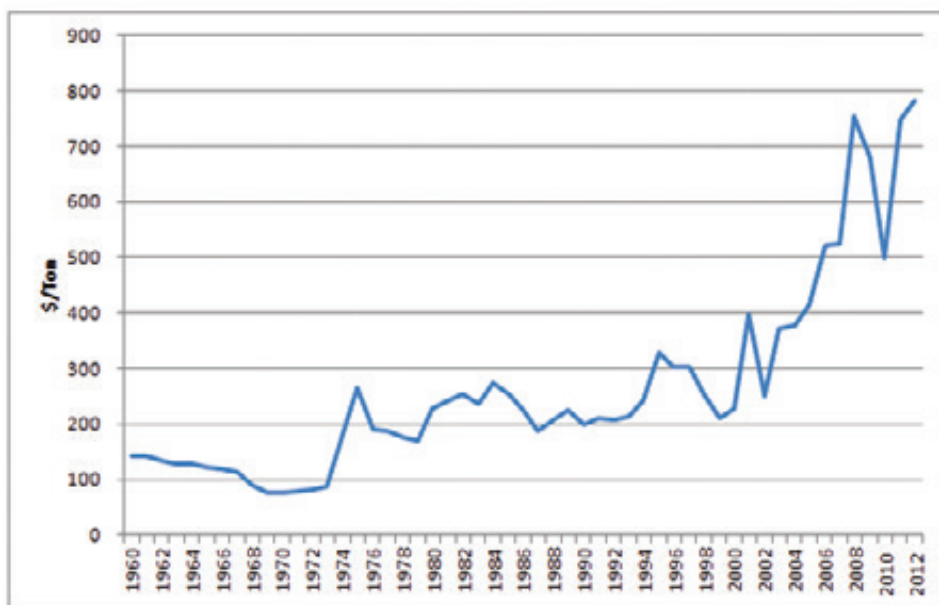
Grain sorghum is unique in that it is grown in such a variety of environments. In harsh dryland conditions, such as in the High Plains, some producers may forgo fertilizer applications in a particular crop year based on subsoil moisture conditions.

Irrigated producers, however, may end up in a situation where they are aiming for the highest yields, which will require more fertilizer than what makes economic sense.

Whether you are a dryland or irrigated farmer, it is important to know how much fertility is already available in your soils for your next crop.

The key to fertility management, regardless of price or environmental factors, is having good information to make an educated decision. Annual soil sampling is a must for sorghum production, both dryland and irrigated. There are many options for fertility testing: pre-plant, in-season tissue sampling, post-harvest, and every combination in

Average U.S. farm prices for selected fertilizers



Source: USDA ERS

between are offered by most testing agencies. The results of this testing can yield information, which can equate to substantial cost savings.

A quick economic example justifies this point. For example purposes we will use a 160 acre farm with a dryland sorghum yield of 75 bushels. While soil types can dramatically impact nitrogen interaction, we will assume this field is fairly consistent in soil type and slope. Costs for core sampling (depth of 20 inches) and lab tests can be as low as \$1.00 per acre, but for practical purposes, we will assume the total costs of sampling and testing this field is \$200 for a single winter test. In general, sorghum requires 0.75 to 1.0 pound of nitrogen per

bushel of yield goal. If the farmer did not sample the field prior to planting, the field may have received a blanket application of 75 pounds per acre or 12,000 pounds of nitrogen over the entire farm. With fertilizer core sampling information stating that 25 pounds of nitrogen remained available to the upcoming crop, the farmer could have reduced the total nitrogen application to 8,000 pounds, which translates to a net savings of \$2,800 for the 160-acre farm.

This example is just one of many that illustrate the importance of fertility testing and management in sorghum. In this case, a \$200 investment yielded \$2,800, a rate of return that would make any investor happy.

With fertilizer prices climbing, constantly changing commodity prices, and increasing amounts of exposed risks, there has never been a better time to conduct fertility tests for your sorghum acres. ♣

	Actual Yield (bu)*	Lbs of N	Cost of N	Cost of Sample	Net Savings
No Sample	12,000	12,000	\$9,000	\$0	
With Sample	12,000	8,000	\$6,000	\$200	\$2,800

**Assumes a per-acre yield of 75 bushels on 160 acres and a cost of nitrogen at \$0.75 per lb of elemental N.*



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Kansas Ethanol Plant Incentivizes Grain Sorghum

Western Plains Energy aims to hold sorghum acres in western Kansas by redeeming seed cost for producers

By Jennifer Blackburn

Steve McNinch, CEO of Western Plains Energy in Oakley, Kan., gave farmers a unique opportunity this spring. The goal: hold grain sorghum acres in western Kansas.

"I can't buy what they don't grow, and my intent was to make sure farmers grew it."

Western Plains Energy has been one of the most profitable ethanol plants in the U.S. since its inception in 2004. In fact, the original investors in the plant have enjoyed a 500 percent return on investment.

Originally, it began producing 30 million gallons of ethanol and transitioned the first year to a 40 million gallon nameplate. Currently, it operates closer to 50 million gallons.

Grain sorghum has played a pivotal role in the plant's growth, currently making up 90 percent of overall production while 10 percent is supplemented with corn.

However, McNinch does not want to stop at 90 percent. His goal is to move to a 100 percent grain sorghum-to-ethanol facility and no longer make corn-based ethanol.

In order to do this, a few things must happen, but McNinch foresees farmers in the area comfortably meeting the needed 16-18 million bushels of grain sorghum the plant will demand annually.



Western Plains Energy in Oakley, Kan., hopes to move to a 100 percent grain sorghum-to-ethanol facility. *Photo courtesy of Western Plains Energy*

As Western Plains Energy prepares to make its transition to an exclusive sorghum-to-ethanol plant, it incentivized farmers to grow more grain sorghum this spring by offering to redeem sorghum seed cost up to 100 bags per producer—no matter the brand or variety.

Additionally, farmers are not required to deliver harvested grain to Western Plains Energy. All they had to do was grow it.

McNinch described the program as a way to give back to the farmers in the plant's area.

"We wanted to pass on some of the 9005 program given to us through the 2008 Farm Bill," said McNinch. "This allows us to give back to the grower and make sure they continue to grow a crop they can be profitable within this area."

So far, the program has been well perceived, and McNinch said some farmers planted more sorghum than they originally planned as a result.

"This program is likely a one-time thing," he said, "but our intent was to get guys to grow it and prove there will be a market for it this fall."

"There are end-users in this area that will pay a price for their grain that makes their operations profitable."

Not only is the end-market value for grain sorghum enticing to producers, but the western plains area of Kansas has historically been a grain sorghum producing area due to the harsher growing conditions the region often faces.

McNinch said the plant's first few years of operation were drought years, and sorghum performed better than dry-land corn. The case remains the same this year as he commented on current crop conditions.

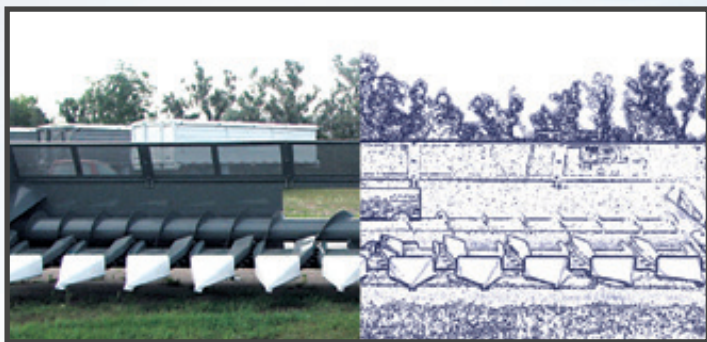
"The grain sorghum is holding on better than corn," he said. "That doesn't mean we still couldn't use some rain though."

Another issue affecting sorghum acres in the area is crop insurance, according to McNinch.

"Basically, the way it's set up, farmers will take a larger risk on not having a crop instead of being encouraged to grow a crop that might live through a drought," he said. "Farmers are driven to plant corn if a bad year happens because that is where the higher insurance rates are."

McNinch said the drought this year will decrease corn plantings next year. Coupled with trend adjusted yields, which National Sorghum Producers is currently working on with RMA, McNinch sees sorghum being even more competitive next year.

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Despite concerns, McNinch is still optimistic there will be enough grain sorghum to meet the plant's gallon demand, and said he sees no trouble sourcing it for the rest of the summer or for the next year.

However, one final step remains for the plant to use sorghum exclusively. Western Plains Energy has been working with NSP and the Environmental Protection Agency for three years to establish a pathway for grain sorghum under the supplemental rule of the Renewable Fuels Standard. McNinch also serves on the Growth Energy board of directors, which has been instrumental in getting sorghum to this point in the process.

"We petitioned EPA last fall, assuming we would get a usable number [green house gas score] for grain sorghum under the RFS to reclassify our fuel as advanced if we use grain sorghum," said McNinch. "We are currently going through the petition process, and at the same time, a pathway for grain sorghum is being finalized."

In order for Western Plains Energy to meet EPA standards, it is installing one of the world's largest anaerobic digesters. McNinch expects the plant will finish construction on the digester in September and be completely online in October.

Currently the plant consumes 6,500 homes worth of natural gas per day, but McNinch said once the anaerobic digester is in place, it will completely replace its natural gas usage with biogas produced from local feedstocks, such as feedlot manure and other feedstocks, making it one of the greenest ethanol plants in America. ♻️



A Feed Option that Makes Sense

Sorghum silage's water efficiency makes it a good fit for High Plains dairies

By Jennifer Blackburn

Declining water tables are affecting food and fiber production across the world. As a result, one particular sector of agriculture in the southwest region of the United States is making major changes—the dairy industry.

On the New Mexico High Plains, an area that saw an influx of dairies in the 1990s, water availability is becoming increasingly scarce, and astute management decisions have never been more important.

Currently, this region is home to close to 318,000 head of milking cows, and the feed and water required to meet the needs of this industry are receiving increased scrutiny.

A water-sipping feed source

A significant portion of milking cow diets is corn-based, but given the region's current water conditions, more and more dairies are using sorghum silage as an alternative feed source for their herds.

According to a study by the Texas Alliance for Water Conservation that analyzed forage data in Kansas, New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma, a number of sorghum varieties approach corn in both yield and quality, while requiring much less water.

The study also showed that profitability to the sorghum silage producer was almost twice that of corn silage, while requiring about one-half the irrigation water.

Forage sorghum makes sense for this region, because, like grain sorghum, it fits well into both dryland and irrigated farming situations as a naturally drought-tolerant crop.

According to the TAWC study, recent efforts by seed companies to develop high quality forage sorghums have increased the potential of sorghum as a viable silage alternative.

Milking and feeding trials were conducted as part of the study, showing forage sorghum can be equal to corn in milk and cattle gain and has the potential to replace corn silage in rations both nutritionally and economically.

Competitive gains

Calvin Willis, dairy nutritionist and owner of CMW Nutrition based in southern California, said his company has started using more brown midrib (BMR) sorghum products. The TAWC study references data that identifies specific BMR sorghums as 10 percent more digestible than regular sorghum. The study also says dairy cows that are fed BMR sorghums produce 10 more pounds of milk per day than cows fed regular sorghum silage and the same amount as cows fed corn silage.

Willis consults dairies in New Mexico, Arizona and California, and said while he traditionally feeds milking cows more corn silage, he has seen more and more dairies utilizing sorghum silage due to water issues.

From a nutritional standpoint, Willis said sorghum silage generally contains 10 percent more fiber and 10 percent less energy than corn silage. Protein is the same, and dry matter depends on how the silage is put up."

Willis admits the required change to a more water-efficient forage like sorghum is needed in many areas, and as nutritionists feed more sorghum silage, they must become familiar with the crop and more comfortable using sorghum silage in rations.

"I'm looking forward to the new technology and research being put into sorghum, which is creating an opportunity to improve forages," he said.


Making the switch

Randy Cain, branch manager at Wilbur-Ellis in Farwell, Texas, oversees approximately 300 accounts of dryland and irrigated land in eastern New Mexico and the western Texas Panhandle. From those accounts, Cain said anywhere from 30 to 35 circles have switched from corn to forage sorghum this year.

"A lot of the change was driven by the drought," Cain said. "It really spooked a few people who didn't want to get caught in the same bad situation as they did last year."

Cain said a lot of corn was chopped early last year because irrigation water was unable to keep up with the required amount needed to finish out the corn crop.

Another result of last year's drought was a decline in dairy and feedlot feed supply. Cain said producers unfortunately did not



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have reserves in their feed pits, inclining more farmers to plant sorghum silage this year to avoid risking another shortage.

"The dairy industry probably started the first move at this time in bringing the forage sorghum price up a lot closer to the corn silage price," he said. "When they started getting in the \$52-\$55 per ton range on forage sorghums, then a lot of guys said, 'There was a drought last year, this is a good price, I'm not going to have as much expense into it, and the risk is less if we incur another disaster.'"

Cain said because his office is located in the heart of dairy and feedlot country, his company consults on 30 percent grains and 70 percent forages, which has significantly increased in the last several years.



As dry conditions prevail over most of the High Plains following last year's drought, many dairies are opting to make the switch to nutritionally competitive and water-sipping sorghum silage.



"Everyone is going to forages because dairies are buying hay like crazy," he said. "The need for hay will continue to increase as will sorghum acres."

Cain said as a result of the drought, some large producing dairies in the area have switched this year almost exclusively to forage sorghum, and the seed cost is another driving factor to this change.

"The average price to plant an acre of corn with seed cost alone is probably \$80-\$90 an acre," Cain said, "whereas to plant an acre of forage sorghum, you're looking at \$10-\$12 max, so that's \$60-\$80 an acre right off the bat in seed savings."

While the sorghum industry shared some concern this planting year in regard to the availability of forage sorghum seed as a result of last year's drought, Cain said most producers in his area were able to acquire seed.

Even though it is not as severe as what producers saw in 2011, east central New Mexico is facing drought-like conditions, and Cain believes as time goes by, more sorghum silage will be planted as a result of the area water situation.

"I think big corn acres will continue to decline," he said. "I don't know if corn will be totally eliminated because of its association with the dairy industry, but we will have to address this need for change some day." 🌽

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SCENES *from* SORGHUM COUNTRY

From planting to harvest, there is a lot going on around sorghum country.



We would love to see your sorghum production photos. They just might end up in the next issue of Sorghum Grower! Send photos to lindsay@sorghumgrowers.com.

Signature of Contestant _____ Date Signed _____

2012 Contest Rules

Please read contest rules carefully before completing the entry form. Changes are in bold.

Contest Deadlines

Regular Entries must be postmarked at least 30 days prior to harvest of the contest acreage. Express Entries must be sent via **overnight delivery** at least 10 days prior to harvest of the contest acreage.

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 Dec. 3, 2012**. There will be no extension of deadlines.

Contestant Qualifications

Contestant must be a paid member of NSP at the time of entry and judging. More than one member of a family may enter, but each contestant must have a separate membership.

Contestant must be a certified FSA owner/operator of the entry plot. A copy of FSA Form 578, including farm summary, must be submitted with the contest entry form.

Contestants can enter more than once, but each entry must be on a separate entry form.

Partnerships can enter under the partnership name if the partnership holds a membership.

Contestants must be at least 14 years of age at the time of entry.

NSP directors, employees and spouses are prohibited from entering the contest.

Contest Divisions

Conventional-Till Irrigated

Conventional-Till Non-Irrigated

Reduced-Till Irrigated

No-Till Non-Irrigated

Mulch-Till Non-Irrigated

Double Crop Irrigated

Double Crop Non-Irrigated

Conventional: Any management or cultural practice excluding no-till, ridge-till or mulch-till.

No-Till: No-till means the soil is left undisturbed from the harvest of the previous crop to the harvest of the next crop with the exception of the injection of nutrients with knives or coulters, not sweeps.

Reduced-Till: No-Till as defined above OR Ridge-Till OR Strip Till, each as defined here. Ridge-Till: The soil is left undisturbed from harvest to planting except for nutrient injection. Planting is completed in a seedbed prepared on ridges with sweeps, disk openers, coulters, or row cleaners. Residue is left on the surface between ridges. Weed control is accomplished with herbicides and/or cultivation. Strip-Till: The soil is left undisturbed from harvest to planting except for tillage of a strip of soil no more than 10 inches wide (with or without nutrient injection). Planting is completed in the prepared strip. Residue is left on the surface between the strips. Weed control is accomplished with herbicides and/or cultivation.

Mulch-Till: This may include Mulch-till OR Strip Till, each as defined here. Mulch-till: The soil may be disturbed one time prior to planting and will have a minimum of 30% residue remaining. Tillage tools such as chisels,

field cultivators, disks, sweeps or blades are used. Weed control is accomplished with herbicides and/or one cultivation. Strip Till: The soil is left undisturbed from harvest to planting except for tillage of a strip of soil no more than 10 inches wide (with or without nutrient injection). Planting is completed in the prepared strip. Residue is left on the surface between the strips. Weed control is accomplished with herbicides and/or cultivation.

Double Crop: To plant sorghum behind a previously harvested crop in the same crop year.

Irrigated: Any field receiving any supplemental water in the past six months or during the current growing season.

Non-irrigated: Any field that has not received any supplemental water since the last harvest or during the current growing season.

Field Qualifications

A complete field of 5 or more continuous acres, planted in the sorghum seed variety named on the entry form, will be designated as the contest field. The contest field must be designated on an aerial map. The aerial map must be included with the entry and the harvest report. Each plot's harvest report will be limited to a single harvest per year. High-tannin sorghum varieties will not be accepted.

Supervisor Qualifications

A qualified supervisor must be present during the entire harvest and weighing. The supervisor must complete and sign the Harvest Report Form. The supervisor must specify the tillage method. Supervisors **MUST** be from the following list:

- * Vocational Agricultural Instructor
- * County or Regional Extension Director or Assistant Director
- * Senior NRCS staff person
- * FSA Office Manager, Field Supervisor or Compliance Technician

Supervisors from the following list will **NOT** be accepted and the entry will be disqualified:

- * Private crop consultants
- * Elevator employees
- * Officials of commercial banks or other lending agencies
- * A company representative of any product used in the contest field
- * A relative of the contestant

Harvesting Rules

The supervisor must be present during the entire harvest of the contest plot and must make all field measurements and computations, oversee the weighing, **INCLUDING** LOADING AND UNLOADING, and moisture testing, verify the date of harvest, and report location of the contest field. The contestant must harvest and report at least five continuous acres from the same contest field that was designated on the entry form. The entire field may be harvested and reported.

A load's gross weight must be determined first, followed by empty or tare weight on the same date. Determination of a load's gross weight **must occur before** determination of tare weight. If time and date of weighing are not automatically stamped on weight

ticket(s), supervisors must note both time and date of both weighings on weight ticket(s).

Detailed rules for measuring, weighing, moisture testing and calculating the yields will be mailed to contestant on receipt of his/her entry.

Reporting Results

Harvest Reports, aerial map, weight tickets and management information are to be completed and sent to the NSP office postmarked no later than 15 days after the date of the final weight ticket on the specific contest plot. All harvest information must be in the NSP office by December 3. Harvest information arriving after close of business on December 3 will not be eligible for competition. NSP is not responsible for contest reports that are lost in the mail. Reports may be mailed by certified mail to ensure delivery.

Judging

Irrigated Division: The contestant's score is determined by yield only.

Non-Irrigated Division: The contestant's score will be the amount in bushels by which his yield exceeds the 5-year county average for that division as determined by USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. (If an entry is received from a county that does not have NASS yields, the average of the NASS yields of all states that are represented in the contest will be used.)

In the event of a tie, the contestant harvesting and reporting the largest acreage will be declared the winner. If a second tie-breaker is needed, the contestant with the longest time between the entry date and the harvest date will be named the winner.

Any entry is subject to further review. Any contestant committing fraud will be barred from the contest for three years.

Contest Winners

The contestant with the highest score in the county will be named the county winner.

First, second and third place state winners in each division will be determined by score. Scores below zero (0) will not be eligible for state and national competition. Only one state award in each division will be given per membership with the entry with the highest score considered for state awards.

The first, second and third place national winners in each division will be named from the first-place state winners based on score. Only one national award will be given per membership, with only the entry with the highest score being considered for national honors.

Recognition will be given for the highest dryland yield.

Two \$250 cash awards will be given for the highest irrigated and highest non-irrigated food-grade, tanglume, tan-plant sorghum scores in the contest.

Hall of Fame: Beginning with the 1997 national winners, contestants who win National 1st Place three times in a division will be inducted into the Hall of Fame and will not be eligible to enter that division.

Awards

County and State winners will receive certificates by mail. National winners will receive trophies. Except where noted, no cash awards will be given by NSP.

SORGHUM SHORTCUTS



Double Crop Divisions Added to NSP Yield Contest

The National Sorghum Producers board of directors revisited the NSP Yield and Management Contest this year looking for ways to incorporate grower input and improve the contest overall. As a result, two new divisions have been added to the contest: Double Crop-Irrigated and Double Crop Non-Irrigated.

These new divisions will allow producers who plant grain sorghum behind a previously harvested crop in the same crop year to compete on a more level playing field among their peers. Visit our website, www.SorghumGrowers.com, for an updated entry form, or use the form on pages 24 and 25 of this issue.

You Could Be the Face of Farming and Ranching

The U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance (USFRA), a unique organization that is a collaboration of nearly 80 farmer- and rancher-led organizations and agricultural partners, has started a movement to bring more local farmers and ranchers together to answer people's questions about how their food is grown and raised. Many voices are leading conversations about food and are often leaving out the people who grow and raise our food.

It's time for farmers and ranchers to take center stage and stop letting other people pretend to represent agriculture. We need a national face to be part of these conversations and represent the real farmers and ranchers of America.

You, the sorghum farmer, can be one of the national Faces of Farming and Ranching.

USFRA is looking for four to five standout farmers and ranchers who are proud of what they do, eager to share their stories of continuous improvement with others, and are actively involved today in sharing those stories. Farmers and ranchers who raise a variety of foods differently, at

differing scale, and in all areas of the country are encouraged to apply as it is important to show American agriculture and all of its diversity.

Go to www.FoodDialogues.com to enter by Sept. 8. Finalists will be announced during the November USFRA Food Dialogues event in New York City. The winners will be announced in early January 2013 and will receive professional media and speaker training, a \$10,000 stipend (to help cover expenses at home while they are serving as a 2013 Face of Farming and Ranching), and a \$5,000 USFRA-approved donation to an ag-related charity or local charity of their choice in their name.

With your help, we can continue building the movement toward creating a stronger dialogue between farmers, ranchers and people who are interested in where their food comes from. (See ad on p. 22)

This program from the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers Alliance is wholly or partially funded by one or more checkoff programs.

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