SPRING 2024

NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS

SORGHUM Grower

SOWING SEEDS

INDUSTRY ADVANCES SORGHUM RESEARCH AND NEW LEADERSHIP

YIELD CHAMPIONS
2023 NATIONAL WINNERS SHARE ALL

Also

HOPE FOR FARM BILL PROGRESS

NEW VANGUARD OF SORGHUM BREEDERS

Included Inside

SORGHUM CHECKOFF NEWSLETTER
KANSAS SORGHUM NEWSLETTER

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NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS
SORGHUM Grower

Spring 2024
Volume 18, Issue 2

NATIONAL SORGHUM PRODUCERS

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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, please call 800-658-9808 or email our office at jennifer@sorghumgrowers.com. For advertising, visit SorghumGrowers.com/advertise.

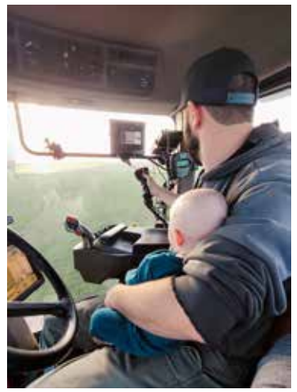
Editor's Desk

Sowing the Seeds of Tomorrow

As we welcome the vibrant renewal that comes with spring, it's a time of reflection and anticipation for us all in the sorghum community. In this issue of *Sorghum Grower*, we delve into the heart of research that continues to propel sorghum into the future.

The commitment to research is more than an investment in sorghum; it's a pledge to our collective future. The strides we've made in improving yield, weed and grass control and water efficiency are testament to the dedication of this community. It's through this lens of innovation and perseverance that we ensure not only the vitality of our industry but also its relevance and resilience for generations to come.

Embracing the future also means nurturing the next generation of farmers, researchers and advocates. It is with immense personal joy that I share the arrival of my first son this past November. As my husband Garrett and I prepare to raise him on our farm, I'm reminded of the profound responsibility we carry in shaping the next generation of stewards of the land. It's a journey that many of you have undertaken, passing down knowledge, values and a love for the land that feeds us and the world.



This season, as we sow seeds both literal and metaphorical, National Sorghum Producers is committed to fostering an environment where the next generation can thrive. We will continue to support research that not only advances the crop but also safeguards it for the future. Most importantly, we will take moments to teach, inspire and prepare the young minds who will one day take up the mantle of agriculture and this unique industry.

I wish you all a productive and fulfilling growing season. May the fruits of your labor be plentiful, and may the bonds within our industry grow ever stronger. Here's to a season of growth, discovery and the promise of a sustainable future.

Jennifer Warren
Vice President of Communications
Sorghum Grower Editor

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Timely Action Could Spur Hope for Farm Bill Progress

By Greg Ruehle

The second session of the 118th Congress is underway, beginning much in the same way as the first session ended last year, with an abbreviated legislative calendar and the impending November General Election, a divided government with narrow margins, entrenched policy and political positions, and little appetite for compromise or collegiality. While the framers of our U.S. Constitution never promised democracy would be pretty, I am not sure they had this model in mind when they drafted the nation's founding documents.

The farm bill being debated today represents the sixth farm bill over my association career. My first exposure, the 1996 Farm Bill, took approximately nine months from start to finish. The 2002 and 2008 Farms Bills took approximately a year to pass, and conversely, the 2012 Farm Bill was adopted in 2014, nearly two years after committee work began. While the current farm bill expired September 30, 2023, it was extended by Congress for one year, and a timeline for completion of new legislation remains up in the air.

With those facts setting the stage, I remain optimistic we can move critical legislation during this shortened legislative calendar. Like the farmer who "dusts in" a crop, or the rancher who prays for safety when a late winter storm blows in during calving season, we must remain optimistic a farm bill will advance even in the face of steep odds.

At the time of this writing, a few facts remain relevant—the 2024 Congressional calendar has a small window of time for legislative debate, the demand is great for dollars to improve the farm safety net and tempers among elected officials are wearing thin.

Obstacles, at the time of publishing, to move a farm bill that is cleared by Congress:

- FY2024 Appropriations bills have been approved, a full six months past their deadline.
- FY2025 Appropriations process has begun with a deadline for passage of September 30.
- House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn (G.T.) Thompson is drafting a "Chairman's Mark" to begin the legislative process for a farm bill revision.
- Senate Agriculture Committee leadership has suggested they too are drafting a bill for introduction this Spring.

▲ NSP VICE CHAIR Amy France and her husband Clint, a recent graduate of the Leadership Sorghum program, along with Executive Director Greg Ruehle visited with Kansas Senator Jerry Moran at his DC office in January.

Priorities for National Sorghum Producers during this farm bill debate revolve around strengthening the farm safety net. Past Chairman Kody Carson testified last year before the Senate Ag Committee that you do not have much of a safety net if your net is only a few inches off the ground. His point is perfectly illustrated by 2024 crop budgets. Grain prices have decreased significantly while input costs remain the same or only marginally declined. The result is a 25.5% decrease in net farm income projected for 2024 compared to 2023 figures, leaving little margin for error.

Strengthening the farm safety net includes a variety of provisions, including updated reference prices to reflect current cost of production estimates; a strong crop insurance program to address unforeseen market turbulence or production cost increases; improvements in the delivery of conservation programs that match the increases in funding provided for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP); and well-funded market and trade development programs that support ongoing international trade development efforts in China and India, among others.

NSP remains engaged on behalf of our members in a number of ways, even as the legislative process struggles to gain momentum. Sorghum has been well-represented in Washington, D.C., so far this year with nearly a half-dozen visits to Capitol Hill by producer leaders and staff to maintain contact with our "sorghum champions."

Additionally, NSP CEO Tim Lust testified in March before the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology regarding the important role of the Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy (ARPA-E) in helping generate data related to sorghum for use in the ongoing biofuels tax credit debate, among other things.

NSP remains engaged with several federal agencies on a variety of topics, including:

- USDA NASS regarding sorghum marketing data to support reference prices.
- USDA NRCS regarding the unique role sorghum plays as The Resource Conserving Crop®.
- EPA regarding more balance between pesticide use and the potential to impact endangered or threatened species.
- Anticipated draft regulations around biofuels production tax credits under a multi-agency process involving the Departments of Treasury, Energy, Agriculture and the EPA.

NSP is also involved in the election process by interviewing candidates and offering support for those who share the views of our collective membership, whether inside or outside the Sorghum Belt. The 2024 Sorghum PAC Series has been successful in raising the funds needed to provide support to sorghum advocates on Capitol Hill.

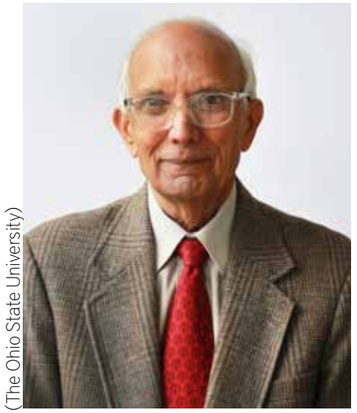
My late grandfather, a farmer and stockman of German descent, always claimed, "It always rains just before it is too late." Living in northwest Iowa definitely helped his odds of being correct, especially as contrasted by his grandson's choice to live in the less predictable High Plains.

For me, Grandpa's message has become more about remaining optimistic as we plant a crop or nurture those newborn animals, and as we steward the resources Team Sorghum has at hand. If we have not had a chance to meet, I look forward to doing so very soon.

Greg Ruehle joined National Sorghum Producers as Executive Director in November, bringing a wealth of experience in agriculture and association management to his new role. Ruehle's background is deeply rooted in agriculture, having been raised on a diversified grain and livestock farm in northwest Iowa. With over 30 years of experience in the agricultural and association management fields, including roles such as President & CEO for the Independent Professional Seed Association, the Nebraska Cattlemen and ServiTech, Inc., Ruehle brings a unique blend of industry expertise and leadership to NSP. Ruehle can be reached at greg@sorghumgrowers.com or 620-253-3137.

A Conversation with a World Food Prize Laureate

By John Duff, Sero Ag Strategies



(The Ohio State University)

Dr. Rattan Lal is a renowned soil scientist who has focused on sustainable agriculture since the early 1970s - well before it was a popular discipline. In 2022, National Sorghum Producers and the United Sorghum Checkoff Program had the opportunity to lend matching support to a Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research (FFAR) grant led by Dr. Lal and his team at The Ohio State University. I recently had the opportunity to visit with Dr. Lal about his background and the project.

What is your background?

Dr. Lal: I'm a soil scientist focused on soil carbon sequestration, conservation agriculture and sustainable land management. I'm originally from India, but I earned my Ph.D. in soil science from The Ohio State University. Today, I serve as a Distinguished University Professor of Soil Science at the School of Environment and Natural Resources in the College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) and Director of CFAES Rattan Lal Center for Carbon Management and Sequestration.

Talk about your key accomplishments.

Dr. Lal: I've received accolades such as the World Food Prize and the Japan Prize, but I've also had the opportunity to advance sustainable soil management to address climate change and enhance global food security. An important ongoing project is the Carbon Farming Alliance for Research and Management (C-FARM) FFAR grant, to which your organizations are key contributors.

Summarize C-FARM in a few sentences.

Dr. Lal: C-FARM aims to confirm and build on decades of experimental research about soil organic carbon and carbon sequestration rates in agriculture across the U.S. By conducting on-farm measurements, C-FARM examines the impact of farming practices on carbon and how they affect soil health, agronomic productivity, greenhouse gas emissions and soil carbon stocks. C-FARM is a collaborative project with over 18 partners across the continental U.S. and Latin America.

What do you hope to accomplish with the project?

Dr. Lal: C-FARM will create actionable soil management strategies to help producers adapt in this changing climate. By offering farmers, agronomists, policymakers, industry partners and other stakeholders access to practical tools and recommendations, C-FARM hopes to empower informed decision-making around soil carbon sequestration practices, thereby building resilience and possible income streams for producers nationwide. The information produced will be key to developing a protocol for rewarding land managers for carbon sequestration and calculating the costs of doing so.

NSP thanks Dr. Lal for his time and efforts. It is a great project the sorghum industry is proud to support while it is ongoing over the next several years. Sorghum farmers were some of the earliest adopters of conservation practices, so we look forward to seeing the tools this project creates that will enable them to continue that legacy of sustainability.

New Vanguard of Sorghum Breeders Shaping Industry's Future

By Jennifer Warren

The sorghum industry is welcoming a new vanguard of sorghum breeders. Each brings a unique set of skills and experiences to advance sorghum research and development in both the public and private sectors. Their collective efforts are geared toward leveraging sorghum's genetic diversity to address challenges in sustainability, adaptability and crop improvement. Below, we get to know a few of many entering the field.

Raghu Sripathi

Raghu Sripathi is the Research Director and Senior Plant Breeder for Warner Seeds, Inc., a position he has held since October 2023. Sripathi's passion for sorghum is fueled by the crop's resilience and potential for sustainability. He has a Ph.D. in plant breeding and genetics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a master's degree in plant and soil sciences from Oklahoma State University.

Sripathi's research, based in Hereford, Texas, is driven by efforts to develop new grain and forage sorghum lines and hybrids tailored for the U.S. and Mexico markets. But why sorghum? According to Sripathi, "sorghum offers an incredible genetic diversity with a wide range of end uses." He is particularly drawn to the crop's adaptability in water-limited environments, a critical attribute as regions battle aquifer depletion and unpredictable weather patterns. Despite sorghum's lag in new traits and technologies compared to mainstream crops like corn and wheat, Sripathi sees a bright future, citing its "excellent water-use efficiency" as a cornerstone for its potential rise.

The influence of Michael D. Casler, Ph.D., Sripathi's doctoral adviser, has played a large role in his career. Under Casler's mentorship, Sripathi embraced the philosophy that "failure is not an option," a mindset that has guided his meticulous approach to plant breeding.

Looking forward, Sripathi is optimistic about sorghum's prospects. He envisions a resurgence in sorghum acreage, driven by advancements in genetic gain, doubled haploid technology, precision phenotyping and crop management technologies.

"My goal is to make better hybrids that serve grower needs with new traits and technologies," he said. From his perspective, sorghum is poised for a significant leap, potentially expanding to a 10-million-acre staple crop. Sripathi's journey is a blend of scientific rigor and a deep belief in sorghum's role in sustainable agriculture, marking him as a pivotal figure in sorghum research and development.

Brian Pfeiffer

Brian Pfeiffer, located in Bishop, Texas, serves as Sorghum Breeder at Innovative Seed Solutions. Pfeiffer's research program is primarily aimed at developing improved sorghum lines and hybrids tailored for the Texas region. Since joining Innovative in 2017, after earning his Ph.D. in plant breeding at Texas A&M University, Pfeiffer has been on a mission to ensure sorghum remains a profitable and sustainable option for farmers. His work focuses on enhancing yield, standability, drought tolerance and sorghum aphid tolerance.

"The plant's ability to thrive in challenging environments fascinates me," Pfeiffer said, appreciating both the crop's toughness and its visual beauty during the grain color transition phase. These characteristics make sorghum breeding a particularly rewarding part of his job.

Mentorship has played a significant role in Pfeiffer's career. He cites Bill Rooney, Ph.D., of Texas A&M University for teaching him the essence of being a scientist and managing a breeding program with humility and kindness. Michael Lenz, a seasoned sorghum breeder at Innovative Seed Solutions, also greatly influenced Pfeiffer, sharing invaluable knowledge and guiding him in the early stages of his career. These mentors have instilled in him a deep appreciation for traditional breeding methods and the irreplaceable value of field evaluation.

Looking ahead, Pfeiffer is excited about discovering new traits in sorghum, such as tolerance to Iron Deficiency Chlorosis (IDC), and integrating these traits into new hybrids. With the challenges of a warming and drying planet, he is optimistic about sorghum's future. "As our planet gets hotter and drier, I believe more people will recognize sorghum's unparalleled resilience on tough acres," he said, foreseeing a growing adoption of sorghum by farmers drawn to its sustainability and resilience.

Zach Brenton

Zach Brenton, as the Chief Technology Officer of Carolina Seed Systems, plays a pivotal role in advancing sorghum agriculture in the southeastern U.S. Co-founding the company in 2018, his leadership in new product development is guided by a singular vision: ensuring that by the season's end, their growers are the most profitable.

Brenton's academic foundation, a Ph.D. from Clemson University in genetics and biochemistry, set the stage for his career. His studies, intertwined with initiatives with the Sorghum Checkoff and the Department of Energy, aimed to bolster sorghum utilization on the East Coast.

Sorghum's resilience and genetic diversity captured Brenton's attention, drawing him to the crop's potential. "I guess I like the underdog," he said, highlighting sorghum's ability to thrive in the East Coast's marginal lands. "I like how sorghum can take a beating and still yield and drive profitability for farms and their families," he added.

Mentorship has significantly shaped Brenton's career. He credits Steve Kresovich, Ph.D., more of a geneticist than a traditional breeder, he said, for laying the foundational knowledge of public genomic resources that Carolina Seed Systems leverages today. Kresovich's influence, alongside introductions to sorghum industry legends like the late Bruce Maunder, Ph.D., and Fred Miller, Ph.D., underscored the importance of building upon previous work to address contemporary agricultural challenges and prepare for future opportunities.

Looking forward, Brenton's anticipation centers on the development of the next sorghum hybrid. This focus is emblematic of his broader approach: a continuous drive for innovation and improvement in sorghum breeding. Brenton's work at Carolina Seed Systems is not just about the immediate benefits but also about contributing to a sustainable and profitable future for agriculture on the East Coast. Through his leadership and vision, Brenton is steering sorghum breeding into new territories, underpinned by a deep respect for the crop's untapped potential and a commitment to the farming communities it serves.

Richard Boyles

Since 2017, Rick Boyles has led cereal grains breeding and genetics at Clemson University's Pee Dee Research and Education Center. As an assistant professor of plant breeding, Boyles' work encompasses not just sorghum but also pivotal winter grains such as wheat and oats. His research program's objectives are threefold: developing superior crop varieties and hybrids, broadening genetic diversity in breeding populations and identifying pivotal genes and alleles to enhance cereal crop resilience.

Boyles' dedication to sorghum is rooted in his doctoral research at Clemson, under the guidance of the Coker Endowed Chair of Genetics, Steve Kresovich, Ph.D. His work on sorghum grain yield and quality sought to uncover genetics capable of boosting productivity and nutritional value.

The vast genetic diversity within sorghum, coupled with its versatility, sustainability, and hardiness, fuels Boyles' optimism for the crop's future. "The genetic diversity that exists in this crop species is so expansive, yet most of the global diversity has not been utilized for crop improvement," Boyles noted, underscoring the untapped potential that sorghum holds.

Mentorship has played a crucial role in shaping Boyles' career. Kresovich, not just a former graduate advisor but also a current collaborator, has been a significant influence, alongside memorable interactions with leading U.S. sorghum breeders like the late Bruce Maunder, Ph.D., Fred Miller, Ph.D., Cleve Franks, Ph.D., and Bill Rooney, Ph.D. These discussions and collaborations deeply inspired Boyles to continue his work in sorghum breeding.

Looking ahead, Boyles sees a bright future for sorghum. With its considerable genetic diversity yet to be fully leveraged, he believes there are vast opportunities for significant advances in the crop. "At a time when crop resiliency is paramount for national and global food security, I am confident sorghum has a rather large seat at the table," Boyles said.

Unlocking Secrets

How Sorghum Hybrids are Made

By Brent Bean, Ph.D., Sorghum Checkoff Agronomy Director

Central to sorghum's continued success is the development of high-performing hybrids, which blend the best traits of different parent lines to enhance yield and express desirable traits such as insect and disease resistance, drought tolerance, standability and overall quality. A considerable amount of science, time and work goes into making modern day sorghum hybrids. But how exactly are these hybrids made?

A hybrid combines the traits of its two parent lines. These two parent lines consist of a pollen parent (R-line) and a seed parent (A-line). The seed parent is male sterile and does not produce pollen. This allows it to be pollinated by the pollen parent to create the hybrid seed that goes into the commercial seed bag and is planted by the grower.

The lifeline of developing a new commercial hybrid is the creation of elite parent lines with desirable traits. These lines are developed by recombining existing elite parental lines to create new breeding populations or by adding specific traits of interest to existing parental lines by crossing an elite line with a specific donor parent of the desired trait. Once the cross is made it can take up to nine generations with traditional breeding techniques before the new line is ready for commercial hybrid production.

The Hybridization Process

1. Parental Selection: The first step in creating a hybrid is selecting suitable parental lines. Breeders choose lines with complementary traits that they want to combine in the hybrid. For example, one parent might have high yield potential while the other exhibits strong resistance to a particular disease.

2. Crossing: Before the cross can be made, one of the lines must be made male sterile. This is done manually by carefully removing the male reproductive organs (anthers), using a procedure called 'plastic bag emasculation', or increasingly by treating with a chemical (TFMSA) that renders the plant male sterile. Pollen from the selected male parent is then transferred to the newly created female parent's receptive stigma.

3. Seed Development: After successful pollination, the female parent develops seeds that contain genetic material from both parents. These seeds are harvested and planted to grow the hybrid seed.

4. Field Evaluation: The hybrid is then grown in experimental plots to evaluate its performance under different environmental conditions.

5. Selection and Testing: Promising hybrids undergo further testing and selection to ensure their stability and consistency across multiple growing seasons and locations. This rigorous testing phase helps breeders identify hybrids that are well-suited for commercial production.

6. Commercialization: Once a hybrid has proven its performance and stability, parent seed is increased to sufficient quantities to allow for commercial seed production. The parent seed is planted in alternating blocks of the pollen parent and seed parent. Grain from the seed parent is then harvested, processed and ultimately goes into the commercial seed bag that is sold to the grower.

The entire process of making the initial cross to develop a new parent line to commercial production of a new hybrid can take 10 to 12 generations. Fortunately, by using greenhouses and utilizing environments with long growing seasons or located in the southern hemisphere, multiple generations can be accomplished in a single year. New technologies such as doubled haploid can also greatly shorten the number of generations needed to achieve homozygosity of the parent seed.

Computational Breeding

Successful breeding has always been a numbers game with the more crosses that are made between parent lines the greater the odds of finding a successful cross that leads to a new commercial hybrid. However, in recent years advances in technology such as genetic markers and genomic sequencing, and drones that identify desirable plants in the field, provide data that can now be entered into computer programs to select the best candidates for crossing. This greatly increases the odds of breeders making a successful cross that leads to a better hybrid.

Creating sorghum hybrids is a complex yet essential process that combines traditional breeding techniques with cutting-edge technology. By carefully selecting parental lines, cross-pollinating them, and rigorously testing the resulting hybrids, breeders can develop the next generation of hybrids with higher yield, improved resilience and better quality.

Harvesting Tomorrow

Sorghum's Climate-Smart Revolution

By Chiree Fields, NSP Climate-Smart Grant Director of Operations

In an era increasingly defined by climate awareness and the urgent need for sustainable agricultural practices, National Sorghum Producers has taken a significant step forward. Wrapping up its pioneering year with the five-year Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities (PCSC) program, NSP has embarked on a journey to innovate with sorghum, focusing on its resilience and versatility as a climate solution.

In its initial phase, NSP adopted a conservative approach to pilot the PCSC program. With 23 producers on board, spanning just over 10,000 acres, this endeavor was a foray into understanding and implementing climate-smart agricultural practices on a scalable level.

This exploratory year proved to be immensely educational, laying down the foundation for what is anticipated to be a significant scaling up in 2024. The hands-on experience NSP gained through this program underscores a commitment to not just adopt but to lead in climate-smart agricultural practices.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture played a pivotal role by requiring NSP in its PCSC application to identify a viable market opportunity for climate-smart sorghum. Initially, the focus was on integrating sorghum-based ethanol into the California low-carbon fuels market under the oversight of the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

This strategic direction aimed to ensure a sustainable pathway for sorghum-based ethanol into one of the largest markets in the United States. Despite a shift in focus toward the lucrative Section 45Z tax credit (a low carbon fuels tax credit aimed at incentivizing climate-smart agricultural practices for grain sold to ethanol plants), the groundwork with CARB laid a robust foundation for future endeavors. The Section 45Z tax credit, a pivotal aspect of this journey, emerged as a significant incentive, bolstering the production and utilization of sorghum for biofuels and beyond.

The implications of the 45Z tax credit for sorghum are manifold, enhancing its appeal as a versatile, climate-smart crop. While biofuels remain a primary focus, NSP is keenly aware of the burgeoning demand for sustainable raw materials in the Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) industry. Climate-smart sorghum is now seeing increased demand from CPG companies, signaling a shift toward more sustainable, eco-friendly food products. NSP is currently in discussions with several major CPG entities and is poised to announce a partnership in the coming months that promises to open new market avenues for sorghum growers.

Sustainability in sorghum is not a novel concept. Farmers have been employing climate-smart practices for years, intuitively understanding the benefits of such approaches not just for their yields but for the environment at large. NSP's PCSC program offers an opportunity to formalize, study and amplify these practices, showcasing the positive environmental impact of sustainably grown sorghum.

NSP's commitment to sustainability goes beyond mere participation in climate-smart initiatives; it is about leading a narrative change. By demonstrating the intrinsic value of sorghum as a crop that not only adapts to but also mitigates environmental challenges, NSP is setting a precedent for the agricultural sector.

As NSP looks forward to scaling up its PCSC program and expanding into new markets with strategic partnerships, it reaffirms our dedication to sustainability, innovation and the betterment of the environment, while simultaneously creating value for sorghum growers across the nation. Learn more at *SorghumGrowers.com/climatesmart.*

Sorghum Reaches New Heights at Commodity Classic

By Jesse Harding Campbell

The 2024 Commodity Classic skyrocketed past previous records by drawing over 11,500 participants to Houston from February 28 to March 2 and eclipsing last year's record-setting attendance in Orlando.

Participants explored 'New Frontiers in Agriculture' and immersed themselves in more than 30 educational sessions while navigating two trade show floors that hosted over 435 exhibitors. For the first time, both U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael S. Regan gave keynotes during the General Session. As in previous years, policy meetings were held by the sponsoring associations, including National Sorghum Producers.

NSP Policy Board Meeting

Several speakers from USDA attended this year's NSP Board of Directors' meeting, which was sponsored by Bayer Crop Science and DEKALB. Undersecretary Robert Bonnie and NRCS Chief Terry Cosby discussed the Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant, Regional Conservation Partnership Programs (RCPP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

The Emergency Relief Program (ERP) and reference price increases were key topics in discussion with RMA Administrator Marcia Bunger and FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux.

Education and Outreach

The NSP and United Sorghum Checkoff Program booths were buzzing on the trade show floor. Attendees picked up popped sorghum and discussed sustainability, agronomy and nutrition with staff and board members. From the trade show stage, Team Sorghum presented on nutrition and sustainability.

NSP Executive Director Greg Ruehle and Vice Chair Amy France, from Scott City, Kansas, updated media on the NSP Partnerships for Climate-Smart Commodities grant program during a press conference. Additionally, over 25 media interviews were conducted throughout the week.

Commodity Classic General Session

The five leaders of the presenting organizations participated in a roundtable discussion during the General Session. For a second year, NSP Chairman Craig Meeker, from Wellington, Kansas, represented sorghum's interest.

Meeker spoke about sustainability, farmer determination and the wildfires in sorghum country, advocating not only for sorghum growers but for all farmers. Receiving several rounds of applause from the audience, the largest came after his thoughts on Congress and the farm bill.

"We need to look at our neighbors as our partners, not our competitors… If we can focus on the things we have in common, and not focus on the things that divide us, I think we will be a heck of a lot better," Meeker said.

"I think we can encourage the 535 members of Congress to do the same thing and work together. I think you'll see a robust, excellent farm bill with a great Title I safety net that will cover all titles," Meeker concluded.

Ross Shafer, the General Session emcee, followed up by asking why Meeker wasn't running for President.

▲ NSP CHAIRMAN Craig Meeker provided remarks on behalf of the sorghum industry during a panel at the General Session with the leaders of wheat, corn, soy and equipment manufacturers. (Jesse Harding Campbell)

Sorghum Yield Contest Awards Gala

Sorghum growers came together to celebrate their yield achievements during the 2023 growing season at the 2024 Sorghum Yield Contest Gala, sponsored by Pioneer®.

NSP Chairman Craig Meeker and Vice Chair Amy France presented awards to 19 farmers. This year's Hall of Fame winners included Jeffrey Barlieb, New Jersey; David Knoll, South Dakota; Santino Santini, New Jersey; and Chris Santini, New Jersey, who was also the 2023 Bin Buster awardee.

NSP CEO Tim Lust presented his 'Sorghum State of the Union,' which encompassed highlights from his more than 30 years in the industry.

Sorghum PAC Casino Night & Auction

The celebration continued after the gala at the Sorghum PAC Casino Night & Auction. The premier sponsor of the Sorghum PAC Series is T&O Farms, and the auction sponsor was BigIron. More than 80 items were donated between the online, live, silent and the upcoming golf tournament silent auction.

"We are very blessed and are grateful to the generosity of our members, industry partners and staff," NSP Industry Relations Director and PAC Event Coordinator Jamaca Battin said. "Though we may represent a small commodity, we have a mighty voice. The fundraising efforts have significantly advanced our mission to promote legislators who understand and champion the interests of sorghum farmers."

NSP is expecting to bring in more than $150,000 to the Sorghum PAC between the Casino Night & Auction and the 4th Annual Sorghum PAC Golf Tournament, scheduled for April 27 in Dodge City, Kansas.

2025 Commodity Classic

Denver will be the host city in 2025. Make plans to attend March 2-4, and join NSP in participating in Commodity Classic events. For more information, visit *CommodityClassic.com.*

How Yield Champions Are Made

Meet the Top Winners of the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest

By Jennifer Warren

In the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest, a diverse group of farmers across the United States showcased the resilience and potential of sorghum under varying climatic conditions. Learn about the steps these winners took to take home top honors in the 2023 contest.

DRYLAND-TILLAGE EASTERN
First Place: Santino Santini
Warren County, New Jersey
Variety: Pioneer 85P58
Yield: 221.06 bpa

DRYLAND NO-TILL EASTERN
First Place and 2023 Bin Buster: Chris Santini
Warren County, New Jersey
Variety: Pioneer 85P58
Yield: 221.75 bpa

Santino and Chris Santini, from Warren County, New Jersey, are a husband and wife duo, both securing victories in the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest. **Santino** won first place in the Dryland-Tillage Eastern Division with a yield of 221.06 bushels per acre, using Pioneer 85P58. **Chris** took top honors in the Dryland No-Till Eastern Division with a yield of 221.75 bushels per acre, same variety, which also earned her this year's Bin Buster award for the highest yield in the contest.

Santino planted 15-inch rows with 155,000 seeds per acre on his winning yield contest plot, which was planted to corn the previous year. He put down 350 pounds of N and 200 pounds of K, alongside herbicide and fungicide treatments, ensuring optimal crop health. **Chris** also planted 15-inch rows with 130,000 seeds per acre. The previous crop was soybeans. She applied 6,000 pounds of manure with the addition of herbicide and fungicide treatments.

Despite initial dry weather, late season rains helped their sorghum flourish. The Santinis said they also believe unforeseen influences, like the Canada wildfires smoke, enriched their sorghum crop with essential nutrients, contributing to their success. During harvest, the Santinis said their goal is always to surpass the 200-bushel-per-acre benchmark. Santino noted, "When we get any more than that, it's a good year." Their sorghum is marketed toward premium bird seed markets.

Both Chris and Santino were inducted into the National Sorghum Yield Contest Hall of Fame this year in their respective winning divisions.

DRYLAND-TILLAGE WESTERN CATEGORY
First Place: David Knoll
Charles Mix County, South Dakota
Variety: Pioneer 89Y79
Yield: 183.32 bpa

Charles Mix County, South Dakota, producer David Knoll was the winner of the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Dryland Tillage West division. Knoll had a yield of 183.32 bushels per acre utilizing Pioneer 89Y79.

Facing a notably dry growing season, Knoll's farm had an estimated 10 inches of in-season rainfall, necessitating reliance on residual moisture from the preceding year. He said timely rains mitigated the impact, contributing to a successful yield.

Knoll planted 15-inch rows with a seed population of 110,000 seeds per acre, applying 100 pounds of N. His sorghum crop followed soybeans, and he managed typical grass and weed pressures, he said.

"Harvest was good because of low moisture, so it came out of the field dry, making it easier to combine this year than most years," he said of his favorable harvest. "We didn't have to fight any green or wet days or anything. So it matured fast."

"It was way better than I expected for the amount of rain we had," he continued, which secured his place in the National Sorghum Yield Contest Hall of Fame in the Dryland Tillage division, adding, "We were just blessed, again."

DRYLAND NO-TILL WESTERN CATEGORY
First Place: Mark Bloss
Pawnee County, Nebraska
Variety: Pioneer 84P72
Yield: 181 bpa

Mark Bloss from Pawnee County, Nebraska, emerged as the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Dryland No-Till West division winner. With a yield of 181 bushels per acre with Pioneer 84P72, Bloss made the most of a 2023 growing season that presented challenges with sporadic rainfall, abundant in July but scarce in August.

Bloss also faced dry soil conditions at planting due to minimal winter moisture, planting on 30-inch rows with a seed population of 144,000 seeds per acre. He applied 181 pounds of N and 52 pounds of P. His sorghum crop, following soybeans the previous crop year, experienced an estimated 16 inches of rainfall.

"I guess I expected good yields or decent yields for as dry as it was, but I didn't expect them to be that good," Bloss said. "It was a nice little surprise."

Bloss credited sorghum's resiliency, saying, "when the other crops started suffering once it stopped raining in August, the milo just hung in there. It was a good harvest."

IRRIGATED EASTERN CATEGORY
First Place: Howard DeShong
Lancaster County, Pennsylvania
Variety: Pioneer 84G62
Yield: 168.34 bpa

Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, farmer Howard DeShong clinched victory in the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest's Irrigated East division with a yield of 168.34 bushels per acre with Pioneer 84G62.

DeShong planted 15-inch rows with a seed population of 140,000 seeds per acre. He applied 60 pounds of N, 6,000 pounds of manure and used a fungicide program. Corn was the previous crop. Like many other sorghum growing regions, DeShong was faced with early season moisture challenges.

"We had an extremely dry spring, then we had timely rains when we needed it," DeShong said, "Then I have a little bit of irrigation there. That definitely helps."

While DeShong had taken a break from growing sorghum, he was pleased to return it into his rotation despite heavy deer pressure in his area. "Fortunately, they ate everything else except for the sorghum."

DeShong said the crop was a little lower than he expected, saying, "I think it was dry during the right period to just stunt the growth. Some of our chemicals didn't get activated properly. We lost a bunch of nitrogen because we applied it then it didn't rain early in the season."

Despite these challenges, DeShong's sorghum yield was strong enough to earn him the top place in his division. "I was happy. On a national basis, I was not expecting that."

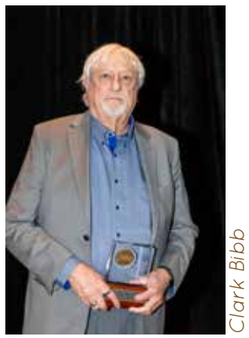

Santino Santini


Chris Santini


David Knoll


Mark Bloss


Howard DeShong


Clark Bibb


Joel and Lexi Spring

IRRIGATED WESTERN CATEGORY
First Place: Bibb and Nighswonger Partnership
Comanche County, Kansas
Variety: Dekalb DKS44-07
Yield: 218.64 bpa

The Bibb and Nighswonger Partnership from Comanche County, Kansas, emerged as the national first-place winner in the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest's Irrigated West division. Their winning field saw a yield of 218.64 bushels per acre, using Dekalb DKS44-07.

Clark Bibb said they opted for 30-inch rows with a seed population of 85,000. The crop received 85 pounds of N (32-0-0) through irrigation during the season. He also applied 21 pounds of P and 39 pounds of K. The previous crop was soybeans.

Bibb's farm, situated 60 miles south-southeast of Dodge City, Kansas, balances dryland and irrigated acres with sorghum proving itself as an effective component to his rotation, particularly in moisture-challenged conditions.

"I was a little surprised. It's one of the circles that I don't check, but my guys kept telling me it was looking really, really good," Bibb said. "One of them took a picture of the young man that checks circles for me. He's 6'4", and it was almost up to his shoulders."

Despite variable weather patterns, including a wet start followed by hot and dry conditions—and early-season herbicide leaching and weed pressures—Bibb said his contest field did better than he expected.

FOOD GRADE CATEGORY
First Place: JnL Farms
Appanoose County, Iowa
Variety: Richardson G37
Yield: 139.56 bpa

JnL Farms from Appanoose County, Iowa, took top honors in the Food Grade Division in the 2023 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest. Joel Spring had a yield of 139.56 bushels per acre, using Richardson G37.

Spring said he dusted in his sorghum crop last year. "We waited three weeks for it to rain, which is very abnormal for us, especially because June is typically our wettest month," he said. "And to go that long without any rain, it was weird planting like that." Spring planted on 15-inch rows, using a seed population of 105,000 seeds per acre. The sorghum crop followed soybeans from the previous year, and inputs included 150 pounds of anhydrous, 50 pounds of P and 60 pounds of K.

"We had a few more weeds this year than normal, just because the herbicide laid there for three weeks, too," Spring said, "so some of it didn't get activated timely, but it was still minimal. I don't feel that it hurt our yield at all. And then at heading, we sprayed a fungicide."

2022-2023
National Sorghum Yield Contest
Hall of Fame Inductees

Jeffrey Barlieb
New Jersey, Warren County
Irrigated Division

David Knoll
South Dakota, Hyde County
Dryland Tillage Division

Chris Santini
New Jersey, Warren County
Dryland No-Till Division

Santino Santini
New Jersey, Warren County
Dryland Tillage Division

Despite encountering a dry growing season, characterized by only two significant rainfall events, his sorghum crop defied his expectations. Timely rains in July and August led to a successful harvest. Spring's sorghum is loaded on rail cars in south central Iowa and is transported to California where it goes into the gluten-free flour market.

Looking ahead, Spring anticipates expanding sorghum acreage and experimenting with longer-season hybrids for enhanced yields.

National Sorghum Producers is now accepting entries for the 2024 National Sorghum Yield Contest. The entry deadline is November 26, 2024. A complete field of 10 or more continuous acres, planted in the sorghum seed variety named on the entry form, will be designated as the contest field. NSP reminds growers, contestants are no longer required to wait 10 days after entering the contest to harvest. Contestants must harvest and report at least 1.5 continuous acres. Harvest reports will be made available to entered contestants beginning May 1, 2024, and all completed forms must be received at the NSP office no later than December 3, 2024. To find the entry form, 2024 yield contest rules and more information, interested growers can visit SorghumGrowers.com/yieldcontest, or contact NSP directly at 806-749-3478 or yieldcontest@sorghumgrowers.com

Seeds of Leadership

Women Shaping the Future of Sorghum

By Haleigh Erramouspe

To face new challenges and bring innovation into the future, it takes diverse strengths and talents. This is displayed by the women who serve on the National Sorghum Producers and United Sorghum Checkoff Boards.

Amy France, Kim Baldwin, Tracy Zink and Macey Mueller all exhibit qualities many value in industry leaders—they are all confident, articulate and thoughtful women with a passion for sorghum. However, they each have distinct roles on their farming operations as well as in their lives that bring rich, diversified opinions and experiences to the boards on which they serve. From their early experiences in agriculture to their education and careers, all four women offer distinct perspectives on sorghum and their vision for the future of the industry.

Amy France

Amy France serves as the vice chair on the NSP board of directors. Now a passionate advocate for agriculture, this was not always a path she envisioned for herself.

Amy's parents were music educators, and she started her endeavors in agriculture as an adult when she met her husband Clint. The first 10 years of their marriage, she worked off the farm in real estate lending. At that juncture, her husband asked her to join their operation in Scott City, Kansas.

"We couldn't afford to hire anyone, and he needed cheap labor," Amy joked before taking a more serious tone. "But really, I thought, 'If this is going to be our sole income, I really need to know a whole lot more than what I know today,' so I got involved."

Clint was a member of Kansas Farm Bureau at the local and county level, so Amy thought this would be the best place to start. She served on their local board and then got involved with their Young Farmers & Ranchers program where she served as chairwoman for a year. This role allowed her to be an ex officio member of the state board of directors for Kansas Farm Bureau—her first inside view of the role policy had in agriculture.

Despite the immensity and complexity of the policy, Amy's interest was sparked, so she dove in headfirst, ready to learn. From that position, Amy was nominated to participate in Partners in Advocacy Leadership, an American Farm Bureau Federation program designed to accelerate advocacy and professional development for young farmers and ranchers.

"That's when I really got into the meat of things, especially the policy driven stuff," Amy said. "I love that stuff, really honing in on the policy side of things. I'm one of those who has to be eyeball deep in something to really understand and absorb, whether that's in the cow pen or in the field, and this experience gave me the chance to do that with policy."

On the farm, Amy's primary role is record keeping, or "driving the desk" as she likes to call it. She manages bill pay, reconciling elevator tickets and paperwork at the NRCS and FSA office. While many of these tasks are second nature now, Amy said she struggled at first. She was surrounded by folks who had been doing these tasks all their life, and, fortunately, those same people were more than willing to answer all her questions.

This perspective as someone new, working to learn all she could about the industry, is something Amy said gives her an advantage when advocating for agriculture and sorghum on Capitol Hill.

"We see the disconnect between our congressmen and the actual farmer because we speak different languages," Amy said. "I used to see my lack of farm background as an extreme disadvantage, but now I see it as an advantage because I can bridge that gap between talking to somebody who was born and raised on the farm where it's second nature to somebody that has the same questions I did and maybe they won't be as intimidated by me."

Amy knew this was the most impactful role she could have to help her family farm and rural communities—trying to make a difference in the policy that drives decisions on the farm. This passion is what has driven her to serve and is now what is fueling her to prepare for her future role at NSP. While she knows the challenge of balancing family and service, she also knows that the work being done today will pay off for the next generation.

"It's a commitment and sacrifice I'm willing to make—missing some things today to make sure our farm keeps farming tomorrow," Amy said. "There were great people long before me, and there will continue to be great people because NSP just attracts those kinds of people. They make sure all voices are heard, and I'm proud to be a part of that."

Kim Baldwin

Kim Baldwin serves as the treasurer of the Sorghum Checkoff board. She and her husband run a diversified operation in Inman, Kansas—a lifestyle similar to how she grew up.

Kim grew up in central New Mexico where her family had a commercial cattle operation and produced alfalfa to supply local dairies and equestrian farms, not to mention the slew of pigs, goats and sheep they had for 4-H and FFA projects. She received her undergraduate degree from New Mexico State University in agricultural extension and education with an emphasis in ag communications and a minor in journalism. After working for the PBS station in Las Cruces and the NBC affiliate in Albuquerque, she took a short-term teaching position near where she grew up. While it was only meant to last through the end of the year, she ended up teaching for the next 17 years.

It was during this period that she met her husband Adam, and moved to Inman, Kansas. Adam and his family have traditionally grown wheat, corn, soybeans and sorghum. They also started growing popcorn in 2017. Kim took on a marketing and communications role for the operation with a particular emphasis on the direct-to-consumer popcorn portion, Papa Baldy's Popcorn & Sorghum.

"I do a lot of work directly with consumers," she said. "People have questions, and they want to know where their food comes from. It's different than taking a truck load of grain to the elevator and unloading it to be done with it. People are not only interested in what they're putting into the bodies of their kids and of themselves but also their pets and their animals."

In her time on the board, Kim has had the opportunity to see how marketing has pushed sorghum forward on a domestic and international scale. From sorghum making its way onto the USDA Food Buying Guide for child nutrition programs to participating in a trade mission in China, promotion has played a key role in the current and potential expansion of new markets for the crop.

"It's a really exciting time to be on the board," Kim said. "There are so many market opportunities both domestically and internationally from human consumption and pet food to aquaculture and beyond. It's exciting to watch as the country and world begin to know more about sorghum."

Prior to Kim's term, her husband served on the Sorghum Checkoff board, as well. While he was in this position, Kim said she would sit in on some of the meetings and observe, which gave her a good idea of the responsibilities and duties the role entailed before she began. This has also created a unique learning opportunity at home to show their children that a family farm truly does mean the entire family.

"I have two kids, one son and one daughter, and it's been really important for them to see the roles men and women can play in agriculture," Kim said. "Back in the day, Dad was gone because he was attending meetings and now Mom is attending. But you know, when we have a trade mission team that comes out to the farm, it's important for our kids to see how both mom and dad are working."

These are the perspectives Kim brings to the Sorghum Checkoff board—teacher, marketer and mom. While this is her expertise, she has appreciated the opportunity to hear the thoughts of others who specialize in different areas through the robust, but respectful, discussion that occurs around various industry topics at the meetings.

"What I've really enjoyed about serving on the [Sorghum] Checkoff board is those different perspectives of the board members who come to the table and provide their insight and expertise within different areas that fall

under the umbrella of sorghum and agriculture," Kim said. "I think those different perspectives create healthy, well-rounded discussion to help us to spend checkoff dollars as responsibly as possible."

Tracy Zink

Tracy Zink is one of the newest members of the Sorghum Checkoff board— appointed in December 2023. However, the conversations around the table were by no means new to her. Tracy was born and raised on a farm in Indianola, Nebraska, in the southwest corner of the state. She now runs the diversified operation with a rotation of sorghum, corn, soybeans and wheat.

"I've gotten the nickname Ms. Sorghum around here," Tracy said through a laugh. "People really started paying attention to sorghum during the extreme drought years when we had our combine in the field and few others got theirs out. We use a pretty strict rotation, mostly because our limiting variable is water. We can't really play for the markets. We have to play for what creates the best opportunity for a solid yield and a hopeful profit."

While Tracy always knew she would come back to the farm, she left after high school to get "far, far, far away" and dive into her other passion—sports and athletics. From that point, until she returned to the farm in 2011, that was her whole life. She worked in sports management, coached volleyball, ran YMCAs and led senior fitness programs. While the connection between farming and exercise and nutrition sciences would be a stretch for some, Tracy easily saw the correlation.

"Fitness was my thing. Your diet matters, as well as your exercise routine, your health, your sleep…everything," Tracy said. "I used to do it with people, but now I do it with plants and our soil. Rather than a diet and exercise program for a person, I'm figuring out what nutrients or fungicides I need to apply or determining the best populations, biologicals or timing. It's been a great analogy to use for non-ag folks."

A third-generation farmer, Tracy has taken on the primary operator role on the farm as her parents age. While her role is ever-changing, Tracy made sure she could do any task on the farm that needed to be done. Whether it was running the combine (her favorite), planting, sales, marketing, inventory or anything else, she can and has done it all. In this role, Tracy still taps into her science background by implementing trial plots on the farm.

"I always have multiple trials in each field," Tracy said. "The maps are colorful and can be confusing, but we're honing down and narrowing in on what really matters and what's best for our farm. We're having fun, and I'm excited about that."

Tracy has also been naturally inclined toward leadership and involvement. She was able to tap into this strength when she discovered Nebraska LEAD, an agricultural leadership development program in the state.

"For me, LEAD is what created the realization that agriculture is a true and complex profession and not just not just a job," Tracy said. "It really instilled in me that to be part of a profession, a great responsibility comes with it."

It was through LEAD that Tracy was introduced to opportunities in the sorghum industry, and she knew she had found a good fit. She was attracted to the bit of underdog spirit the crop has as well as the opportunity to be involved in a more close-knit group.

Tracy knows she is in a unique position compared to other young producers in the industry. She said although she is not married and was not blessed with children, this has opened the door for her to really invest her time in leadership opportunities such as serving on the Sorghum Checkoff board.

"I'm really excited about the Sorghum Checkoff," Tracy said. "I knew immediately it was a professional organization, they would allow me to grow and they would encourage me to participate, and I greatly respect that. It's already been a great experience, and I'm excited to maximize my term and make a difference."

Macey Mueller

Macey Mueller has been a member of the Sorghum Checkoff board since 2021. She grew up on a commercial cattle operation in Kansas before attending Oklahoma State University where she earned her degree in agricultural communications.

After graduation, she spent several years living in Oklahoma City, working as the communications director for Oklahoma Farm Bureau. She had some exposure to farming, just from growing up in a rural community, but she was not immersed in the industry until she married her husband Josh in 2015 and moved to his family farm in Halstead, Kansas.

"I've learned a lot having been married now for over eight and a half years," she said. "You're just trying to put the different pieces together because it is such a complex industry, whether it's the agronomy side or the marketing side, there's just a lot to it. I've tried to take the things I know from the livestock side of things and apply those or ask the same kind of questions on the farming side."

The Mueller's farm is a blend of crop and cattle production, and they also own a sale barn in a town about 50 miles from their home. Add in four children and freelance writing for several livestock publications, and Macey has a full schedule. She does the books for both the farming and cattle enterprises and helps in the fields and with the livestock. Additionally, she works the Thursday sale and manages the marketing and social media for their sale barn.

A good portion of the crops grown on their farm are used for silage or grazing in a backgrounding operation for their cattle enterprise. Through this, the Mueller's were able to develop a market for niche direct-to-consumer beef sales. While it started as a means for neighbors to put aside a quarter or half of a beef to stock their freezer, the Mueller's saw a sharp rise in new customers during the pandemic and have enjoyed using the opportunity to connect with individuals who want to know more about agriculture.

With her current role in their operations and former career working for the Oklahoma Farm Bureau, it was natural for Macey to join Kansas Farm Bureau when she moved back to her home state. This is where her involvement in the sorghum industry started. As a county Farm Bureau board member, she was introduced to staff members at Kansas Grain Sorghum.

Macey's husband had spent several years on the Kansas Beef Council, which gave her a strong appreciation for checkoffs and what they do for commodities. Combining this understanding with her background made Mueller an incredibly strong candidate for the Sorghum Checkoff board.

Macey also had a unique connection to the sorghum industry through her children. Her youngest daughter has celiac disease. This diagnosis opened Mueller's eyes to the world of gluten-free foods and diets—a world where sorghum plays a key role in helping individuals maintain a healthy and balanced diet.

"As a woman involved in farming, I think that lends itself to some different perspectives and different ideas on things," Macey said. "Additionally, as a mom of a child with celiac and someone with a background in communications and livestock production, I think there's just some different ideas I can bring to the table. Our board has so many unique skillsets to offer, and that allows us to make the best decisions and to help promote and educate others about sorghum."

In addition to her place on the Sorghum Checkoff board, Macey serves as one of the board's delegates to the U.S. Grains Council (USGC). While serving in this position, she has gained a greater insight into and appreciation for how U.S. sorghum helps to feed and fuel people around the world. This role has also exposed her to the work the USGC is doing to promote sorghum globally and develop new markets for the crop.

Whether it has been around the board room table in Lubbock, traveling to Latin America with the USGC or attending nutrition conferences to share the health benefits of sorghum, Macey said her favorite part of serving on the Sorghum Checkoff board has been the opportunity to learn from those around her.

"I just really appreciate the opportunity to represent Kansas producers in this type of role and to work with other board members from the Sorghum Belt," Macey said. "That's been another really exciting part of this journey is just getting to know other folks involved in the industry and to learn how they operate. Sorghum just has this collaborative spirit, and we are all taking the chance to learn from our peers."

In honor of Women's History Month in March, National Sorghum Producers extends its recognition and gratitude to the remarkable contributions of Amy France, Kim Baldwin, Tracy Zink and Macey Mueller, along with all the women shaping the U.S. sorghum industry. These four women exemplify leadership, resilience and innovation, bringing diverse perspectives and expertise to the boardrooms of NSP and USCP. Their dedication and passion not only advance the sorghum industry but also inspire future generations of women in agriculture. We celebrate their achievements and honor their invaluable contributions to our industry.

KansCAT Collaboration Lays Groundwork for $65M USDA Award

By John Duff, Sero Ag Strategies

More than three years prior to its landmark $65 million award under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Partnership for Climate-Smart Commodities (PCSC) program, National Sorghum Producers partnered with the Kansas Natural Resources Conservation Service on an effort commonly known as the KansCAT project. The project still stands as a testament to the power of collaboration, and it was pivotal in laying the groundwork for the NSP's current USDA-backed PCSC effort.

KansCAT focused on sustainability data collection through a new data platform, which became instrumental in driving the sorghum industry's strategies under the new NSP PCSC effort. But perhaps more importantly, KansCAT catalyzed a key partnership between Kansas Sorghum and Kansas State University (KSU), which has proven invaluable in fostering a new generation of talent in the sorghum industry.

Adam York, CEO of Kansas Sorghum, and then-coordinator of the fellowship program is passionate about the project's practical impacts.

"The KansCAT initiative allowed us to step up and create a successful fellowship program," York said. "It wasn't just about collecting data; it was about providing young professionals from KSU with real-world experience in our industry. While we certainly aimed at improving on-farm profitability and sustainability, we also focused on developing the next generation of talent for the sorghum industry."

"KansCAT also maximized our state association's intentionality for our fellows' time by providing technical application of conservation and sustainability practices while we provided day-to-day career and professional skills development. The program is now in its fifth year providing training to the next generation of talented sorghum professionals in Kansas."

Sanders Williams, who now works as the director of inclusion and diversity for NSP's PCSC program, is one such young professional. Williams's journey from a KSU student with no prior agricultural background to a key figure in the sorghum industry highlights the project's broader impact.

"My work with KansCAT at Kansas Sorghum was pivotal," Williams said. "It was about more than just the research. It drove my understanding of the importance of direct engagement with farmers and the practical application of our technical findings."

The project's ability to bridge technical knowledge with practical application provided Williams and other fellows and interns with a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the sorghum industry.

"Working closely with the technical staff at NSP and seeing how our data and surveys could directly benefit Kansas sorghum producers in a practical way was incredibly rewarding," Williams said. "The first tool that KansCAT equipped me with was an appreciation of the importance of meeting face-to-face with the producers we're working with. In turn, this allowed me to see the importance of developing a communications plan while also getting more comfortable working on the technical farm level."

In addition to helping set the tone for sustainability initiatives in the industry, the KansCAT project—at its core a partnership between NSP, Kansas Sorghum and KSU—was a springboard for fostering a skilled workforce dedicated to advancing the interests of sorghum producers. For these reasons, KansCAT will forever remain an important milestone for sorghum producers and their industry partners.

SORGHUM CHECKOFF
NEWSLETTER
sorghumcheckoff.com | Spring Edition 2024

Sorghum Checkoff Launches Search for Class VII of Leadership Program Participants

Earlier this year, the Sorghum Checkoff launched recruitment for Class VII of the Leadership Sorghum program. Leadership Sorghum is a 14-month program designed to steward future farmer leaders in the sorghum industry. Through a blend of hands-on experiences, classroom learning and valuable networking opportunities, selected individuals will gain a deeper understanding of every aspect of sorghum, from seed to market and beyond.

"The design of the program is centered around farmers who are passionate and are looking for opportunities to grow in this industry," Sorghum Checkoff Executive Director Norma Ritz Johnson said. "This investment in the program is not just an investment into individual class members but the U.S. sorghum industry as a whole. Those who choose to participate will walk away armed with the skills, knowledge and understanding to be the next generation that takes the sorghum industry to new heights."

U.S. Department of Agriculture approved criteria states that eligible applicants must be actively engaged in sorghum production within the U.S. and U.S. citizens. Fifteen growers will be accepted into the highly successful program's seventh class.

"Watching each class member grow, learn and experience new things has been so fulfilling," Director of Emerging Markets & Grower Leader Development Shelee Padgett said. "We are equipping each Leadership Sorghum class with the tools to advocate for sorghum, take newfound knowledge back to their communities and further the industry by becoming involved in leadership positions across the industry."

Full consideration will be given to all applicants regardless of age, gender, race and/or occupation. Every effort will be made to select a class based on the applicant pool, which is representative of the entire sorghum industry, its diversity and rural community interests.

Applications for the program are available at LeadSorghum.com and are due by 5:00 pm CST on September 13, 2024. Accompanying reference forms must be submitted by the 5:00 pm CST September 13 deadline, as well. Following the application deadline, all applications and references will be reviewed by a selection committee. Finalists may be contacted via phone to arrange an interview.

WHAT'S INSIDE

SORGHUM THE SMART CHOICE

Sorghum Checkoff Embarks on India Exploratory Trade Mission

In order to create opportunities for United States sorghum in India, an exploratory trade mission to the country was funded primarily by the United Sorghum Checkoff Program, but also included the U.S. Grains Council and National Sorghum Producers. The trip took place from Jan. 13 to 20 and meetings were held in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Himatnagar, Mumbai, Pune, and Satara.

The recent exploratory trade mission to India encompassed a whirlwind of visits and meetings spanning six cities in just five days. Deliberations during these sessions were laser-focused on unlocking avenues for U.S. sorghum, with discussions ranging from its application in human consumption to industrial starch extraction, feed grain utilization and ethanol production.

One of the standout qualities of sorghum in this context is its distinction as a non-GMO option among U.S. commodities. This characteristic holds significant promise for gaining traction in markets, particularly in India, where the preference for non-GM products is paramount. Despite hurdles such as India's imposition of a hefty 50% tariff on U.S. sorghum and the absence of completed Pest Risk Assessments from both governments, the upward trajectory of food product demand in India remains evident.

The primary goal of this initiative is to meticulously explore and underscore the potential of sorghum as a dependable and advantageous source of both food and feed. Although India predominantly fulfills its sorghum needs through domestic production, recent mandates such as the E20 blend policy set to be implemented by 2025/2026 indicate a shifting landscape. With projections suggesting that demand for food and ethanol will outstrip grain production in India, there's a pressing need for sustainable and affordable feedstock options that also minimize environmental impact—where U.S. sorghum could step in as a viable solution.

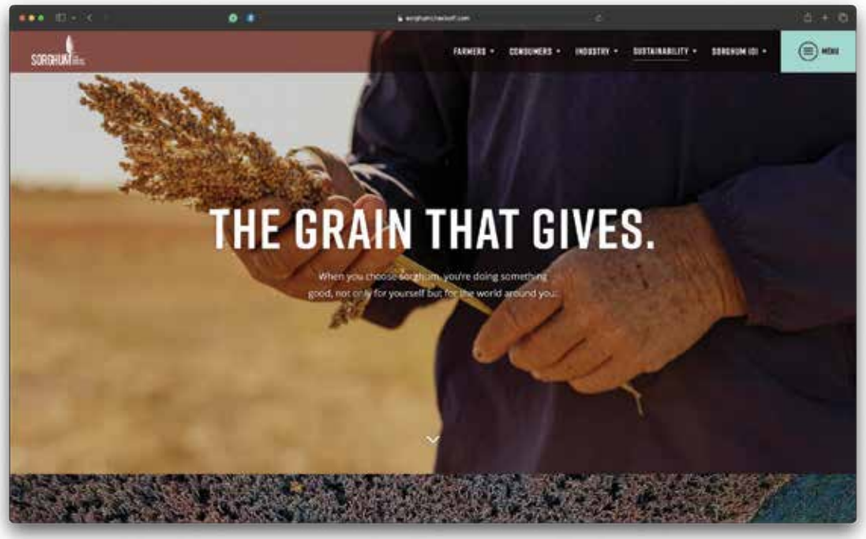
Post-trade mission, the Sorghum Checkoff has laid out plans to disseminate industry samples and conduct comprehensive lab analyses of U.S. sorghum. These efforts are geared towards showcasing the specific attributes and benefits of our product. While acknowledging that this endeavor is part of a long-term strategy, it marks a significant stride forward. By consistently demonstrating how U.S. sorghum can address critical needs, producers can strategically position themselves for continued growth. This becomes especially pertinent as India's middle class expands and its biofuel industry matures, presenting a ripe market for U.S. sorghum.

Participants of the U.S. exploratory trade mission to India included: Norma Ritz Johnson, executive director at the United Sorghum Checkoff Program; Florentino Lopez, consultant at Creando Mañana; Adam Schindler, past chairman of the board at United Sorghum Checkoff Program; Craig Meeker, Meeker Farms in Wellington, Kansas; Shelee Padgett, director of emerging markets at the United Sorghum Checkoff Program; Jace Hefner, manager of global trade at U.S. Grains Council; Reece Cannady, regional director of South Asia at U.S. Grains Council; Amit Sachdev, regional consultant at U.S. Grains Council; Nayantara Anandani Pande, marketing specialist at U.S. Grains Council and Sonjoy Mohanty, senior ethanol advisor at U.S. Grains Council.

Sorghum Checkoff's Vision for a Sustainable Future Comes to Life with Newly Designed Web Pages

The Sorghum Checkoff reiterated its dedication to highlighting and promoting sorghum's vital role as a sustainable solution through a newly designed web page launched in February devoted to informing, educating and engaging both producers and consumers in understanding the environmental benefits of The Resource Conserving Crop®.

The updated web page offers a comprehensive overview of sorghum's sustainability story, emphasizing the contributions of sorghum farmers toward environmental conservation. By spotlighting key facts and data points, consumers can dive deeper into the intricate narrative of sorghum's sustainability, linking to additional research and information available on the platform.



"The sorghum crop embodies sustainability, addressing critical concerns such as water conservation, soil preservation and wildlife protection," Sorghum Checkoff Executive Director Norma Ritz Johnson said. "Our industry recognizes the pressing need to amplify the message of sustainable agriculture, catering to diverse audiences including producers, consumers and industry stakeholders."

The updated landing page will feature Sorghum Checkoff's recently integrated video series to better enhance the users experience by providing dynamic insights into the sustainability practices of sorghum. Housed within the platform, these videos testify to sorghum's standing as The Resource Conserving Crop®.

"Our investment in this updated platform signifies our commitment to serving as the central resource for information on sustainable agriculture," Sorghum Checkoff Director of Communications Clint White said. "Through engaging content and interactive components, we aim to captivate both producers and consumers and inspire them to explore the sustainable benefits of sorghum."

With a user-friendly interface and engaging visuals, the revamped web page is a gateway to understanding sorghum's sustainability story. Learn more about how Sorghum Sustains® at *Sorghum Checkoff.com/impact.*

Sorghum Checkoff Welcomes Chase Obenchain as Corporate Chef Consultant

In January, the Sorghum Checkoff announced the addition of Chef Chase Obenchain as the organization's first Corporate Chef Consultant. With his extensive culinary background and a passion for sorghum, Chef Obenchain is set to bring a fresh perspective and innovative approach to the Checkoff's culinary initiatives.

Obenchain, originally from North Carolina, developed a passion for culinary arts at a young age. Graduating with distinction from the Culinary Institute of America, he holds a variety of degrees, including Baking, Pastry and Culinary Science, allowing him to shape his lifelong appreciation for sorghum in various culinary art forms.

Obenchain has dedicated his career to creating delicious and nutritious food that is accessible to all. His experience includes key roles in some of the world's leading Consumer Packaged Goods (CPG) and ingredient companies. Notably, he also served as the Innovation Chef at Campbell's Soup Company®, contributing to the design, development and launch of multiple brands within their portfolio. He was also a Corporate Chef Consultant on the food-service team at Dole Packaged Foods®, spreading awareness and developing innovative ideas, recipes and menus.

"I am honored to join the United Sorghum Checkoff Program and contribute to the promotion of this good-for-you grain," Chef Obenchain said. "This is an exciting opportunity to showcase sorghum's incredible possibilities for creating delicious and nutritious culinary experiences. I look forward to collaborating with the team and bringing fresh ideas to the table."

Chef Obenchain's culinary proficiency and innovative mindset will play a crucial role in continuing to advance the Sorghum Checkoff's goals and mission, highlighting sorghum's nutritional benefits in both the consumer and culinary world.

Discover recipes, nutritional details, and learn more about initiatives by the Sorghum Checkoff to enhance visibility in human food markets and maximize return on investment for sorghum farmers at *SorghumCheckoff.com/consumers*.

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

May 27	**Memorial Day**	*Office Closed*
July 14-16	**SNA – School Nutrition Association**	*Boston, MA*
July 29-31	**USGC Board of Delegates Meeting**	*Salt Lake City, UT*

For more events, visit sorghumcheckoff.com/calendar

USCP MISSION

The Sorghum Checkoff commits to reveal the potential and versatility of sorghum through increased shared value.

SORGHUM THE SMART CHOICE

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Sorghum Shortcuts

4th Annual Sorghum PAC Golf Tournament: Register Your Team Today!

The 4th Annual Sorghum PAC Golf Tournament will be held on April 27, 2024, at noon, once again in Dodge City, Kansas. The tournament, sponsored by T&O Farms, features a four-person scramble and will take place at the Mariah Hills Golf Course.

Two teams will play per hole for the duration of the tournament, and happy hour and awards will follow. Starting at 11 a.m., Prime On The Nine will be serving a come-and-go pulled pork lunch, sponsored by Helena Agri-Enterprises, LLC - Scott City, Kansas, with drinks sponsored by Baker's Acres. Registration will remain open until all tournament spots are filled. Registration includes lunch, cart rental, gift bag and green fees.

Learn more at *SorghumGrowers.com/sorghum-pac*. All experience levels are welcome.

Sorghum Foundation Scholarships Open

The National Sorghum Foundation has opened applications for three scholarships available to college students studying agriculture in the 2024-2025 academic year. These scholarships include the Bruce Maunder Memorial Scholarship, Darrell Rosenow Memorial Scholarship and the Bill Kubecka Memorial Scholarship. Each scholarship is valued at $1,500, and the deadline to apply is June 1, 2024.

The National Sorghum Foundation promotes research and education for sorghum and develops the leadership potential of active university students interested in studying agriculture and, more specifically, the sorghum industry. For more information about the National Sorghum Foundation and other scholarship opportunities, visit *SorghumGrowers.com/foundation-scholarships*, or contact Jeff Dahlberg at *jeff@sorghumgrowers.com*.

2024 Sorghum Yield Contest Open For Entry

The 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest is now open. The entry deadline for the 2024 Sorghum Yield Contest is November 26. The goal of the yield contest is to increase grower yields, transfer knowledge between growers to enhance management and identify sorghum producers who excel in each state and throughout the country.

A complete field of 10 or more continuous acres, planted in the sorghum seed variety named on the entry form, will be designated as the contest field. NSP reminds growers, contestants are no longer required to wait 10 days after entering the contest to harvest. Contestants must harvest and report at least 1.5 continuous acres. Harvest reports will be made available to entered contestants beginning May 1, and all completed forms must be received at the NSP office no later than December 3.

To enter, contestants must be a paid NSP member at the time of entry and harvest. More than one member of a family may enroll, but each member must have a separate membership. All entries will be reviewed and divisions will be placed off yield only. National and state winners will be recognized at the 2025 Commodity Classic in Denver, Colorado.

Interested contestants can visit *SorghumGrowers.com/yield-contest* to see official contest rules and the entry form, or contact NSP directly at 806-749-3478 or *yieldcontest@sorghumgrowers.com*.

NSP Opens Board Application Process

The National Sorghum Producers began accepting applications on April 8 for three positions on the 2024 board of directors. NSP board members lead efforts to create positive change for sorghum farmers through effective policy and relationships and hold a vision to promote, advocate for and defend the sorghum industry. To be qualified to serve on the board, candidates must be a current NSP member and have a passion for representing sorghum farmers through advocacy and fundraising activities. No prior board experience is necessary, only a desire to improve the sorghum industry. Applications are due Friday, May 10, 2024, at 5 p.m. CST. Each position includes a three-year term, beginning October 1, 2024, the start of NSP's fiscal year.

For the application or more information visit *SorghumGrowers.com/leadership* or contact NSP Executive Director Greg Ruehle at 620-253-3137.

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