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SORGHUM Grower

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CEO UPDATE

The Winds of Change

Change is inevitable, and right now, we are in the middle of a season of transition—as a country, in our industry, on the farm and at NSP headquarters.

A new administration in Washington brings shifts in policy, priorities, and a few changes and challenges we must navigate. As we look ahead, National Sorghum Producers (NSP) remain steadfast in our mission to advocate for sorghum farmers and ensure our voice is heard in conversations that impact our livelihoods. As negotiations continue regarding trade, NSP remains actively engaged with the Trump Administration working to find international markets for sorghum.

Closer to home, we are also seeing change in our fields. Sorghum acres are shifting as water availability declines and demand for forage sorghums grows, particularly for dairy production. This shift underscores the adaptability of sorghum and its importance in meeting the needs of a changing agricultural landscape. Whether grown for grain, forage, or silage, sorghum continues to be a resilient and resourceful crop.

Change is also happening right here at *Sorghum Grower*. After 15 years of dedicated service to our industry, Jennifer (Blackburn) Warren has moved on to new opportunities. She played a critical role in shaping the voice of sorghum, particularly during pivotal moments like the China trade disruptions in 2018. She also mentored a generation of communications professionals who now work across the agricultural industry. Jennifer's leadership and contributions to this publication will not be forgotten, and we thank her for her years of service.

While change can bring uncertainty, one thing remains constant—NSP's commitment to our growers. No matter what challenges arise, we are here, working for you. Whether in the halls of Congress, the boardrooms of industry partners, or in the pages of this magazine, NSP is on the front lines ensuring that sorghum remains a vital part of American agriculture.

As we navigate these transitions together, I encourage you to stay engaged, stay informed, and, as always, stay Sorghum Strong and remember something good is about to happen!

Tim Lust

Tim Lust, CEO

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Sorghum's Road Ahead: Trade and Policy Shifts Under Trump 2.0

By Sydney Lundberg, Combest, Sell & Associates

President Trump's second term has introduced significant changes in trade, governance and other areas of policy. The administration's broad policy shifts are beginning to take shape, prompting debate over their long-term impact. In agriculture, these changes are expected to have varying effects, but many are optimistic. Since her confirmation in late January, Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins has voiced support for farmers and outlined her priorities for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

On March 3, Rollins addressed farmers at Commodity Classic, providing details on the economic assistance package authorized under the American Relief Act in December. The $10 billion Emergency Commodity Assistance Program (ECAP) began distributing funds to growers in March, with another $20.8 billion designated for disaster relief very tentatively slated for payment in May or June. While these funds provide immediate financial aid, some industry groups, including National Sorghum Producers (NSP), have raised concerns about the need for long-term policies that ensure market stability and access.

One of the administration's first major policy changes this spring was the significant cuts at USAID. The move sparked intense debate, but all parties agreed on the importance of providing U.S.-grown commodities to food-insecure communities. On average, 3-5% of the U.S. sorghum crop is allocated to food aid, and NSP supports this contribution through these programs. In fact, NSP endorsed bipartisan, bicameral legislation to transfer the Title II - Food for Peace program from USAID to USDA.

"NSP supports this shift," NSP Chairwoman Amy France. "It ensures the long-term success of Food for Peace and the efforts to deliver American-grown grain to food-insecure communities worldwide."

While food aid represents a relatively small portion of sorghum's reach, international trade dominates. Over 55% of the domestic sorghum crop is consumed by partners abroad. Historically, China has been a significant buyer, purchasing over 90% of these exports. However, recent tariffs on Chinese imports coupled with proposed in-country maritime fees of up to $1.5 million per U.S. port call for Chinese-built ships have led to a pause in sales.

▲ United by similar hardships, commodity group leaders testified on the economic challenges facing farmers. From left to right, NCC Vice Chair Nathan Reed, NCGA President Kenneth Hartmann Jr., NAWG President Keeff Felty, NBGA President Chris Engelstad, NSP Chair Amy France, ASA Chair Josh Gackle, USPF member Garrett Moore and USA Rice BOD Jennifer James. (Photo by U.S. Senate)

▲ NSP leaders visited Washington, D.C., in April, meeting with lawmakers, USDA officials and the White House to champion sorghum priorities. From left to right, NSP CEO Tim Lust, Chair Amy France, Vice Chair Garrett Love and Tom Sell, co-founder of Combest, Sell & Associates.

Last year's export volume of 5.7 million metric tons now seems like a high-water mark, as escalating trade tariffs, driven by broader geopolitical tensions, have made large-scale sorghum shipments to China increasingly rare. This situation is widely expected to continue until a deal is reached between the two countries' leaders like was done in 2018.

With the administration's aggressive trade negotiation style, NSP is hopeful that new international market opportunities for sorghum will emerge, particularly in India, which is a high-growth potential market. NSP is also focused on expanding domestic demand through initiatives like year-round E15 and tax credits to strengthen ethanol markets.

Stability for American sorghum growers also depends on a new farm bill. The house and senate agriculture committees have been active, holding hearings and press conferences to drive the need for new legislation. On February 7, NSP Chairwoman France testified before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry during a hearing on Perspectives from the Field: Farmer and Rancher Views on the Agricultural Economy, Part 1. In her testimony, France highlighted the challenges farmers face and stressed the urgent need for action.

"Farmers are struggling with a combination of rising costs and unpredictable weather," said France. "The current farm safety net is not enough. We need adjustments to Price Loss Coverage (PLC) reference prices and marketing loan rates to provide better support for sorghum producers."

Despite promising discussions, challenges remain in passing the farm bill in 2025. Budget reconciliation is a key factor with significant implications. The house package, led by Speaker Mike Johnson and Majority Leader Steve Scalise, proposes a $230 billion cut to the agriculture committee over 10 years. In contrast, the senate majority, led by Majority Leader John Thune, is pursuing two bills—one for tax and border security, another for broader spending—that avoid such deep cuts to agriculture, with a $1 billion reduction in spending over 10 years.

At the time of printing this magazine, neither chamber had passed its budget resolution. House debates are stalled by a slim 219-215 majority, while the senate budget committee refines its proposal amid GOP unity talks. The next steps involve each chamber passing identical budget resolutions with reconciliation instructions by April, committee drafts being submitted in May, and a consolidated bill dropping by summer.

Reconciliation could serve as a vehicle for the farm bill or parts of it. Past reconciliation efforts provide valuable context. The 1994 midterms, which saw Republicans gain control of the house for the first time in 40 years, led to the Federal Agricultural Improvement and Reform (FAIR) Act of 1996. Similarly, the 1990 Farm Bill reauthorization was shaped by budget reconciliation negotiations between Democrats in congress and President George H.W. Bush.

Perhaps the most instructive example came in 1981 when President Ronald Reagan's victory and Republican control of the senate reshaped federal spending policy and reduced farm program spending by $15 billion. While the Byrd Rule, which restricts what can be included in reconciliation legislation in the senate, is not self-enforcing, it could complicate matters further by restricting reconciliation to provisions with direct budgetary effects. Farm bill measures like PLC adjustments may survive, but policies in some of the smaller titles of the farm bill deemed incidental or irrelevant fiscally could be struck, requiring a 60-vote waiver to override.

Whatever the outcome of the budget process, agriculture will remain resilient. As history shows, agricultural policy is often shaped by broader political forces. While this spring has brought uncertainty, NSP continues to advocate for policies that support sorghum farmers, ensuring long-term stability and success.

Sorghum Puffs Up the Baby Food Market

By Lanier Dabruzzi, MS, RD, LD, Sorghum Checkoff Director of Nutrition & Food Innovation

If you've wheeled your shopping cart through the baby aisle of a grocery store lately, you've probably noticed that much of the real estate on the shelves once dedicated to pacifiers and teething rings is now taken up by a new product: baby puffs. These small extruded snacks are designed to help infants develop their pincer grasp, hand-to-mouth coordination and easily dissolve in mouths that don't yet have teeth. The baby puff and snack market grew to $4 billion in the U.S. alone last year and is expected to increase to more than $5 billion over the next 5 years.[1]

What is causing this explosion in market share for these tiny baby snacks? In part, sorghum.

Parents of the more than 18 million children born during the COVID baby boom are more interested than ever in the health and environmental impact of the foods they choose for themselves and their families, which is why sorghum is the ingredient baby puff companies are now choosing.[2]

Maximizing the nutrition in every bite for children is essential because their nutritional requirements are significantly higher than those of adults due to the rapid growth and development of their bodies. For example, a child needs 1.5 times more protein, 5.5 times more iron and more than 4 times more zinc per kilogram of body weight than an adult.[3] Companies and parents are now seeking out foods rich in these nutrients, like sorghum, to fill nutrient gaps.

A recent Consumer Reports test showed that baby puffs made with rice or cassava are high in heavy metals, which has prompted many companies to change to sorghum as their base ingredient.[4] The Sorghum Checkoff has worked with many of these brands on development and reformulation for their puffs, including Once Upon a Farm™, Mission MightyMe and more.

Emily Luna, baby brand manager for Once Upon a Farm, says, "By using ingredients like sorghum, our puffs create a market that intentionally drives positive environmental impacts through ingredient selection. Our choice of going with sorghum versus rice or cassava in our products was made for many reasons, including the reduced potential for heavy metals and the benefits to the environment of this drought-resistant grain."

Whether it is in Gerber® Lil' Crunchies®, Plum® Organics Mighty Puffs, Happy Baby® Snackers or Yumi® Rice-Free Puffs, sorghum continues to strengthen the newest generation of children and consumers.

[1] https://www.thebusinessresearchcompany.com/report/baby-puffs-and-snacks-global-market-report

[2] https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDP1Y2023.DP05?q=United+States&g=010XX00US

[3] Alles MS, Eussen SR, van der Beek EM. Nutritional challenges and opportunities during the weaning period and in young childhood. Ann Nutr Metab. 2014;64(3-4):284-93. doi: 10.1159/000365036. Epub 2014 Oct 2. PMID: 25300272.

[4] https://www.consumerreports.org/health/food-safety/lesser-evil-serenity-kids-cassava-puffs-high-lead-levels-a2654657249/

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ARPA-E's TERRA Program: 10 Years of Sorghum Innovation

By John Duff, Serō Ag Strategies

A decade ago, the Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy (ARPA-E) launched the Transportation Energy Resources from Renewable Agriculture (TERRA) program to revolutionize bioenergy crop development with a specific focus on sorghum. Today, the program's legacy is evident in advancements in sorghum research and breeding technologies, as well as the emergence of innovative companies.

ARPA-E and the TERRA Program

ARPA-E was established to fund high-risk, high-reward research that private industry often overlooks. The TERRA program specifically targeted the enhancement of sorghum, a crop long recognized as a cornerstone of biofuel production. By integrating advanced remote sensing technologies, genomics and computational analytics, TERRA sought to create a comprehensive platform for crop improvement and commercialization.

William "Bill" Rooney, Ph.D., a Regents Professor at Texas A&M University and leader of the Variety Testing and Sorghum Breeding Lab, who also holds the Borlaug-Monsanto Chair in International Crop Improvement and is an AgriLife Faculty Fellow in Sorghum Breeding and Genetics, noted that the TERRA program has brought significant advancements to the field.

"The ARPA-E funds invested in the sorghum projects impacted the crop in two primary ways," said Rooney. "First, these projects allowed our program to develop and refine methodologies for phenotyping an array of different traits with efficiencies never seen previously. Second, they enabled us to study completely new traits in sorghum."

Rooney emphasized that high-throughput phenotyping—the rapid measurement of a plant's physical traits—has revolutionized sorghum research.

"For example, the ARPA-E funding allowed us to identify the most efficient methods for high-throughput phenotyping," he said. "We evaluated many phenotyping methods from gantry to ground-based to aerial systems. From this work, a clear path for phenotyping using primarily UAVs (unmanned aerial vehicles) has developed and is now applied in many research programs from sorghum improvement to agronomic evaluation of yield potential."

The TERRA program also helped advance sorghum genetics, particularly in root system research, through ARPA-E's later ROOTS initiative.

"These projects allowed sorghum researchers to study new traits in sorghum," said Rooney. "The ARPA-E ROOTS project also elucidated details in the sorghum root system that have been used to adjust the footprint of sorghum lower in public models, making it a more appealing and sustainable crop in agronomic systems and biofuel markets alike."

▲ High-throughput phenotyping gantry scans sorghum plots with precision cameras to accelerate crop improvement.

Technological Advancements in Sorghum Research

The TERRA program's focus on phenotyping technologies led to significant breakthroughs. Researchers used UAVs to analyze above-ground phenotypes, a development Rooney called game-changing.

"Sorghum researchers regularly estimate above-ground phenotypic traits using UAVs because the data is more consistent and reliable than ground-based estimates," said Rooney. "In addition, UAV phenotyping facilitated completely new traits based on repeated temporal measurements. These types of traits are now used in predictive breeding, and they were simply impossible using traditional phenotyping methods."

Commercialization and the Birth of Carolina Seed Systems

The TERRA program not only advanced research but also laid the foundation for new commercial ventures. One of its biggest success stories is Carolina Seed Systems (CSS), a company that emerged from TERRA-funded research.

The CEO of Carolina Seed Systems, Terry Coffey, Ph.D., is passionate about the company's origins in the program.

"The objective of our ARPA-E grant was to combine predictive genomics with advanced robotic and phenotyping measures to accelerate the rate of genetic improvement in plant breeding," Coffey said. "The ARPA-E funding enabled the development and validation of the technology platforms which were applied to our sorghum breeding program and facilitated the development of superior hybrids specifically targeted to the Mid-Atlantic and Southeastern U.S."

ARPA-E's unique funding model played a crucial role in CSS's success.

"The difference between ARPA-E and some other federal granting agencies is that ARPA-E funds the initial R&D for technology development but also provides funding and loans for initial commercialization," said Coffey. "The result is that advanced technologies from the laboratory are delivered into the commercial sector to enhance the profit opportunity for growers."

Impact on Farmers and Rural Communities

CSS fills a key niche in regional sorghum production, focusing on hybrids tailored to specific environmental and market conditions.

"We saw that our potential customer did not have access to sorghum hybrids that were well suited for their farms," said Coffey. "Our hybrids are specifically designed to take advantage of the unique opportunities and overcome the challenges of our region's climate, soils, and cropping systems."

The Southeastern U.S. is one of the country's largest grain-consuming regions due to its concentrated livestock and poultry industries. Coffey, whose background is in animal nutrition and the pork industry, understands the importance of educating livestock producers about sorghum's value as a feed ingredient.

"Part of my job is to educate end-users like swine and poultry producers about the feeding value of CSS sorghum compared with other cereal grains," he said. "Our hybrids will play an important role in improving profits and sustainability for both the growers and end-users of sorghum across the agricultural systems we serve."

Continued Innovations and Future Prospects

The success of the TERRA program has paved the way for ongoing research and commercialization efforts in sorghum. ARPA-E has continued to support innovation not only through ROOTS, but through programs like SMARTFARM and the recently launched TEOSYTNE program, a $38 million effort aimed at reducing synthetic nitrogen fertilizer use in corn and sorghum farming.

As a part of this effort, research teams—including teams from the original TERRA participants of the Texas A&M University and the Donald Danforth Plant Science Center—are developing sorghum hybrids with nitrogen-saving traits, furthering sorghum's role as a sustainable cropping option.

Conclusion

A decade after its launch, the TERRA program stands as one of ARPA-E's most successful initiatives in agricultural innovation. It has transformed sorghum research, developed cutting-edge phenotyping technologies, and helped launch commercial ventures that benefit farmers and the broader agricultural sector.

As the industry continues to evolve, ARPA-E's model of blending public research investment with private sector applications ensures that future innovations in sorghum will continue to drive profitability, sustainability, and market expansion.

For sorghum growers and industry leaders alike, the legacy of TERRA is just beginning.

Prussic Acid-Free Sorghum? Now Available

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

One of sorghum's many benefits is its use as a grazing forage. However, under certain conditions, the plant can produce hydrocyanic acid (HCN), commonly known as prussic acid, which poses a risk to livestock. Unlike most grasses, sorghum contains a molecule called dhurrin in its epidermal cells. For prussic acid to be released, dhurrin must be broken down by enzymes normally separated from it in the mesophyll cells. When plant cells rupture—due to a freeze, drought or other stress—the dhurrin and enzymes combine, triggering prussic acid production.

After years of research, Mitch Tuinstra, Ph.D., at Purdue University, developed a dhurrin-free sorghum, eliminating the risk of prussic acid. Tuinstra's team conducted multiple studies evaluating the nutritional value, palatability and safety benefits of dhurrin-free sorghum compared to conventional varieties, with promising results.

It is important to note that the dhurrin-free trait was developed through traditional breeding methods and is not genetically modified.

In 2020, S&W Seed Co. licensed the dhurrin-free trait from Purdue and has since worked to commercialize the technology. "While the trait can be used in any sorghum type, the company first introduced it in a sorghum-sudangrass hybrid to provide prussic acid-free forage for grazing and hay production," said Scott Staggenborg, S&W's product marketing manager.

The first prussic acid-free sorghum hybrid, SP4408 PF™, is set for commercial release. While only a limited supply will be available for early adopters this spring, the hybrid is expected to be widely accessible by 2026, according to Staggenborg.

In an S&W Seed trial comparing prussic acid-free sorghum to a brown-midrib (BMR) sorghum-sudangrass, animal performance was similar, with an average daily gain of approximately 2 pounds over a 62-day grazing period.

Palatability should not be a concern, as indicated by research from Shelby Gruss, Ph.D., as part of her doctoral work at Purdue. In a study comparing prussic acid-free sorghum to three commonly sold sorghum-sudangrass hybrids, sheep showed a clear preference for the prussic acid-free variety. In the study, the amount of forage present in each variety before grazing was measured and then compared to the quantity of forage following grazing. After grazing the amount of forage present was reduced by 37% in the prussic acid-free sorghum, much less than the reduction in forage in the other three varieties, indicating a strong preference for the prussic acid-free variety.

This breakthrough technology could ease concerns about grazing and, to a lesser extent, feeding sorghum hay. By using prussic acid-free sorghum, cattle producers will no longer need to plan around environmental stressors like freeze or drought that can trigger prussic acid formation in damaged leaf tissue.

▲ Prussic Acid-Free Grazing Trial. (Photo from Purdue study.)

Prairie Resource Partners

A New Conservation Tool for Sorghum Farmers

By Rylie Lux

Sorghum farmers know the value of conservation—protecting soil health, improving water efficiency and sustaining land for future generations. However, navigating federal conservation programs, understanding eligibility requirements and accessing technical assistance can be challenging. That is where Prairie Resource Partners (PRP) comes in.

PRP is a new subsidiary of National Sorghum Producers (NSP) dedicated to helping farmers implement conservation practices that benefit their operations while also strengthening NSP's advocacy efforts. PRP provides technical assistance, conservation planning and support for growers engaging with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), ensuring that sorghum producers get the help they need to make informed decisions about conservation programs. Our professionals also support the documentation and compliance requirements by working directly with local FSA offices, eliminating most farmers' biggest reservations about program participation.

Why Prairie Resource Partners?

Federal conservation programs, particularly those administered through NRCS, can provide producers with valuable financial and technical support. However, the complexity of program applications and implementation often discourages participation. PRP was formed to bridge this gap.

Through PRP, sorghum growers have access to one-on-one assistance to help them develop conservation plans, determine eligibility for programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and ensure they maximize available resources for soil health, water conservation and long-term sustainability.

Additionally, PRP strengthens NSP's advocacy efforts by shedding light on how conservation policies impact sorghum farmers. By working directly with growers via PRP, NSP can relay real-world challenges and opportunities to policymakers, ensuring conservation programs work for sorghum producers on the ground and on the farm.

Meet the team

Brad Younker grew up on a fourth-generation family farm in west-central Kansas. He is a Kansas State University graduate and a Licensed Professional Engineer in Kansas, bringing 15 years of experience as an agricultural engineer with the NRCS.

His expertise includes irrigation system design, water resource management and conservation engineering. Throughout his career, Younker has worked closely with producers to develop efficient water-use strategies and implement conservation practices that improve soil health and long-term sustainability.

Brandt Underwood, a Texas native, has a strong background in production agriculture and a bachelor's degree in agronomy from Texas Tech University.

During his 20-year tenure with the NRCS, Underwood specialized in navigating the complexities of federal conservation programs. His expertise in soil health, precision agriculture, and irrigation efficiency enables him to help sorghum growers implement practical, results-driven conservation strategies tailored to their operations.

Supporting sorghum farmers, Strengthening NSP

Prairie Resource Partners goes beyond conservation—it supports sorghum farmers and strengthens NSP's impact in the industry. By providing specialized technical assistance, PRP helps growers maximize conservation programs while also securing additional funding to bolster NSP's advocacy efforts.

Whether farmers need guidance on NRCS programs, want to explore conservation opportunities, or are focused on ensuring their farm's long-term sustainability, PRP is here to help.

For more information on PRP and how it can support your operation, visit *sorghumgrowers.com*.

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Sorghum Climbs New Summits at Commodity Classic

By Jesse Harding Campbell, Marsh Wren Creative

The 2025 Commodity Classic set a new benchmark for farmer participation, with a record-high 5,221 farmer attendees among the total 11,395 participants. Held March 2-4 in Denver, the event embraced the theme "Elevating Excellence in Agriculture."

NSP leadership engages with USDA

National Sorghum Producers (NSP) Chairwoman Amy France and CEO Tim Lust joined leaders from other major commodity groups for a critical meeting with USDA Secretary Brook Rollins. The discussion focused on pressing challenges facing sorghum farmers and the broader agricultural industry, including farm policy, trade and disaster relief.

"Engagement with USDA and other ag leaders allows us to advocate for policies that directly impact our producers," NSP CEO Tim Lust said. "By working together, we can secure a stronger future for sorghum and all of U.S. agriculture."

In addition to the meeting with Secretary Rollins, Team Sorghum met with officials from the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Risk Management Agency (RMA), and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to discuss critical policy and program developments. Participants included:

- **Farm Service Agency:** Kimberly Graham, acting administrator; Kathy Sayers, director, Safety-Net Division; Jamie White, acting deputy administrator.
- **Risk Management Agency:** Heather Manzano, acting administrator; Francie Tolle, deputy administrator of compliance.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service:** Louis Aspey, acting chief; James Tillman, senior associate chief; Karen Woodrich, deputy chief of programs.

As new political appointees settle into their roles, NSP will soon be in their offices, reinforcing its commitment to advocating for sorghum farmers. These meetings ensure their voices are heard in key policy discussions at the highest levels of government.

Commodity Classic General Session

At the General Session, France joined a roundtable discussion with agricultural leaders to address some of the most pressing challenges facing farmers today—declining crop prices, prolonged drought and shifting trade dynamics. She underscored the urgent need for timely disaster relief, stronger farm safety nets and expanded markets for sorghum, both domestically and abroad.

▲ Commodity group leaders discussed industry challenges during the 2025 Commodity Classic. From left to right, the panel moderator, Ross Shafer, addresses NSP Chair Amy France, NCGA President Kenneth Hartmann Jr., AEM Ag Sector Board Chair Greg Petras, NAWG President Keeff Felty and ASA President Caleb Ragland. (Photo by Jesse Harding Campbell)

"Farmers are facing some of the toughest conditions we've seen in years—low prices, high costs and relentless drought. Disaster relief and farm safety nets aren't just talking points; they're lifelines. We need timely support to keep our operations running and ensure the next generation has a future in agriculture," France said.

She also emphasized the power of cross-commodity collaboration and farmer advocacy, noting that a united agricultural voice is critical to shaping policies that strengthen rural communities and secure the future of U.S. farming.

▲ USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins met with NSP Chairwoman Amy France and CEO Tim Lust, as well as other commodity leaders, at Commodity Classic.

Team Sorghum's booth at Commodity Classic

The NSP and United Sorghum Checkoff Program booths were a hub of activity throughout the event, drawing in attendees eager to learn more about the crop's many benefits. Staff, board members and state association representatives were on hand to engage with visitors, answering questions and sharing insights on sorghum's role in agronomy, nutrition and more.

One of the highlights was the opportunity to sample sorghum puffs, which sparked conversations about the grain's versatility and health benefits. Attendees saw firsthand how sorghum fits into their purchasing habits and agricultural practices, from its drought resilience to its expanding presence in consumer food products.

"Many attendees are familiar with sorghum or milo from their family farms, but it's amazing to see their reaction when they try it for the first time," said Clint White, USCP director of communications. "It really drives home how much potential this crop has in today's food market.

Sorghum Yield Contest Awards

The Sorghum Yield Contest Gala, sponsored by Pioneer, reached the room's maximum capacity with 250 attendees. The gathering celebrated the accomplishments of the top sorghum growers from across the nation. France presented awards to the 19 highest-yielding growers in the contest, acknowledging their significant contributions to the industry.

The 2024 Bin Buster Award was presented to K&M Farms of Dallam County, Texas, for their 240.01 bushels per acre yield with Pioneer 85P75 in the Irrigated Western division. Additionally, JnL Farms from Appanoose County, Iowa, was inducted into the Sorghum Yield Contest Hall of Fame, recognizing their achievement of three national titles in the Food Grade division.

More details on this year's winners are available on page 16.

Sorghum PAC Casino Night & Auction

The celebration continued after the gala at the Sorghum PAC Casino Night & Auction, where attendees enjoyed a lively evening of fun and fundraising. T&O Farms served as the premier sponsor of the Sorghum PAC Series, and BigIron generously sponsored the auction. The event brought together industry partners and supporters, all committed to advancing the sorghum sector's presence on the Hill.

"We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of those who donated and made purchases, especially in such a tough agricultural economy," said NSP Industry Relations Director and PAC Event Coordinator Jamaca Battin. "The support we receive is a testament to the commitment of our members and industry partners to ensure sorghum farmers have a strong voice in Washington."

The 5th Annual Sorghum Golf Tournament, planned for April 26 in Dodge City, Kansas, will play a key role in ensuring sorghum farmers' voices are heard in a rapidly evolving political landscape.

Looking ahead to 2026

The next Commodity Classic will be held Feb. 25-27, 2026, in San Antonio, Texas. For more information, visit *CommodityClassic.com*.

2024 Sorghum Producers Yield Contest National Winners

By Cambry Cline

In the 2024 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 2024 contest.

K&M Farms, operated by **Kenny Rathjen** and his farming partner, Monte Simerly, in Dalhart, Texas, clinched victory in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Irrigated Western category and this year's Bin Buster Award for producing the year's highest-yielding entry at 240.01 bushels per acre.

Rathjen said he grew Pioneer 85P75 under pivot irrigation on a 50-acre field, a 114-day red sorghum hybrid known for excelling in high-water environments. Following a wheatlage crop in a double-crop rotation, the field received 12 tons of manure before wheat planting. After harvesting wheatlage, Rathjen double-disked the stubble and planted sorghum on May 25 at 75,000 seeds per acre in 30-inch rows. He said he treated it like corn, dribbling 28-0-0-5 fertilizer and adding 45 gallons per acre via a liquid coulter rig, plus 10 gallons fertigated three times, on top of manure carryover.

Rathjen applied Dimilin 2L and Steward EC for pests, plus two fungicide doses—Trivapro and Absolute Maxx—for health and test weight. A July 5 herbicide mix intentionally stressed the sorghum, boosting tillering after watering.

"It looked ugly for a few days, but we poured water on it, and it greened up," he said. With 16 inches of irrigation and 6 inches of rain, the sorghum tillered heavily, driving the yield.

"We had a really good season," said Rathjen. "The only problem we did have when we were getting ready to harvest, we got snow. So, it was a late one."

With his eyes already set on next season, Rathjen aims to split-plant an 80-acre circle in 15-inch rows. Rathjen said he wishes everyone luck with next year's crop.

Davidson County, North Carolina, producer **Guy Bowers** of the Billy H Bowers Farm Trust won first place in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Dryland No-Till Eastern category with a yield of 209.73 bushels per acre using Pioneer 84G62.

Bowers planted 30-inch rows at a population of 125,000 to 130,000 seeds per acre, following a corn rotation. He emphasized the importance of soil fertility, using grid-mapped soil samples and spreading fertilizer by prescription. Despite a dry start, timely rains and two hurricanes brought much-needed moisture.

"We got about seven inches of rain in two days, and that really helped me," he said. Planting later in July assisted in avoiding heat stress and taking advantage of late-season rainfall. Bowers said he credits consistent fertility management and traditional fertilization methods for his success.

"It really is luck on timely rain and my planning," Bowers said. A consistent winner at state and national levels, he said he attributes success to timely precipitation and strong soil nutrition. He said he's found Pioneer 84G62 suits his land well and plans to maintain his proven approach, avoiding unnecessary changes.

"If you build a good base fertility and spend money on real fertilizer—not snake oil—you're better off," he said. "I'm not doing anything different than past years, but it's working, so I don't want to rock the boat."

Washington County, Kansas, producer **Rod Stewart** of Stewart Family Farms LLC took first place in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Dryland-Tillage Western category. Stewart achieved a yield of 183.05 bushels per acre with Pioneer 84G62.

Stewart said he planted in 15-inch rows using a Kinze 3665 planter to shade the ground early, conserve moisture and control weeds. He targeted 85,125 seeds per acre, choosing Pioneer 84G62 for its tillering and row-filling ability. He applied 150 pounds per acre of NH3 in spring, leveraging a 30-pound nitrogen credit from the previous soybean crop. At planting, he used 3 gallons of low-salt starter in-furrow and 3 gallons of additional phosphorus behind the closing wheels.

Planting started dry, but rains arrived soon after, providing moisture until late August, Stewart said. A 50-day dry spell followed, lasting until late October.

"Shading the ground early helped conserve moisture," Stewart said. "I was very satisfied with the weed control all season." He credits this success to switching to a pre-emergence program and the 15-inch rows. The drone delivered

2024
National Sorghum Yield Contest
Winners

DRYLAND-TILLAGE WESTERN
First Place: Stewart Family Farms
Washington County, Kansas
Variety: Pioneer 84G62
Yield: 183.05 bpa

IRRIGATED WESTERN
First Place and 2024 Bin Buster:
K&M Farms
Dallam County, Texas
Variety: Pioneer 85P75
Yield: 240.01 bpa

DRYLAND NO-TILL WESTERN
First Place: Dylan Knoll (accepted by David Knoll on his behlaf)
Charles Mix County, South Dakota
Variety: Pioneer 88P71
Yield: 192.05 bpa

DRYLAND-TILLAGE EASTERN
First Place: Jeffrey Barlieb
Warren County, New Jersey
Variety: Pioneer 85P58
Yield: 225.18 bpa

IRRIGATED EASTERN
First Place: Chris Santini
Warren County, New Jersey
Variety: Pioneer 85P58
Yield: 190.35 bpa

DRYLAND NO-TILL EASTERN
First Place: Billy H Bowers Farm Trust - Guy Bowers
Davidson County,
North Carolina
Variety: Pioneer 84G62
Yield: 209.73 bpa

FOOD GRADE
First Place and Hall of Fame Inductee: JnL Farms
Appanoose County, Iowa
Variety: Richardson G37
Yield: 158.94 bpa

fungicide and nutrients with precision, boosting yield.

"I really like the effectiveness and accuracy of the drone," he said, confirming plans to use it again. Stewart said with these changes, his sorghum stood well and harvest was smooth despite early rainfall challenges.

"Even though the season started off dry, we planned for a great crop," said Stewart. "My Dad taught me a long time ago that you should never plan for a failure and treat the crop like it's going to be the best one ever."

Charles Mix County, South Dakota, producer **Dylan Knoll** of Knoll Farms secured first place in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest Dryland No-Till Western category with a yield of 192.05 bushels per acre. Knoll planted Pioneer 88P71 in 15-inch rows at a population of 80,000 to 100,000 seeds per acre, following corn.

Knoll said he opts for narrower spacing to produce smaller heads that dry faster in fall, aiding harvest on his no-till operation. After corn, weed pressure was low, but he said he applied a hefty dose of nitrogen and sulfur. A cold, wet spring delayed planting, and though he went in slightly early, he said it paid off.

"Later on in the year, it got really dry," he said. Rains tapered off in July, dragging yields on higher ground, but Knoll said lower areas excelled. A dry, windy fall sped drying without lodging, making harvest smoother than usual.

Knoll credits a fall-applied pre-emergence herbicide and a solid burndown for excellent weed control. He lets weeds sprout before planting, then burns them down, waiting for warmer soil to ensure quick germination. Switching from 30-inch to 15-inch rows has boosted yields, improved weed management, and helped retain soil moisture through faster canopy closure.

Warren County, New Jersey, producer **Chris Santini** of S&C Santini Farms, emerged as the national first-place winner in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest

Irrigated Eastern category. Santini achieved an impressive yield of 190.35 bushels per acre with Pioneer 85P58.

Santini said the precipitation arrived at just the right moments, setting the stage for an outstanding crop. She planted 15-inch rows with a seed population of 120,000 seeds per acre, applying 250 pounds of nitrogen and 150 pounds of potash. This year's sorghum followed a corn crop.

"The dry fall made bringing in the crop much easier," she said, allowing for a smooth and efficient harvest without the challenges of excess moisture. Santini said she recommends using FMC Adastrio fungicide for crop health.

Among the contest's top producers, she said she's "always striving for increased yields each year."

JnL Farms from Appanoose County, Iowa, took top honors in the Food Grade Division in the 2024 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest. Joel Spring had a yield of 158.94 bushels per acre using Richardson G37.

Spring said he started early, applying all ammonia by late March. Rain arrived mid-April and persisted for a month, pushing planting to May 17. Corn and soybeans were in by May's end, with sorghum planted by June 10.

"Once it started raining at the end of June, it kept raining through September," Spring said. "We had one of the best overall crops on our farm."

Spring said he cut some sorghum at 18% moisture, drying it in bins, and finished the day before Thanksgiving. He applies fungicide at heading for a yield boost, better standability and grain quality.

2024
National Sorghum Yield Contest
Hall of Fame Inductees

JnL Farms
Iowa, Appanoose County
Food Grade Division

"We don't do anything too unique," he said. "We are going to keep using shorter season hybrids to try and get harvest done earlier." Spring's win earned him a spot in the contest's Hall of Fame, a milestone he said he values as an Iowa grower.

"We hope it shows other farmers in our area that crops besides corn and soybeans can be successful and profitable," he said. "Sorghum is a crop that can keep growing acres in southern Iowa and northern Missouri." *To learn more about the 2025 National Sorghum Yield contest, see page 30.*

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Water-Smart Partnership

Effective Conservation Through Collaboration

By Carlee Frosoni, Serō Ag Strategies

A strategic partnership announced at this year's Commodity Classic stands to revolutionize water conservation and strengthen market opportunities for sorghum farmers, amid increasing water scarcity across the Sorghum Belt. The collaboration between National Sorghum Producers (NSP), Ducks Unlimited (DU), Dairy Farmers of America (DFA), and General Mills marks a first-of-its-kind effort to take a systems-based approach to water conservation across the agricultural supply chain.

Water conservation in agriculture has traditionally faced significant hurdles. Reduced irrigation often leads to yield losses, alternative crops struggle with market access, and the economic burden of conservation typically falls on individual farmers alone. This partnership aims to change that by distributing both the responsibility and the benefits across the entire supply chain.

"It takes a sense of community to really save water," said Matt Durler, managing director of farm programs at NSP and a fourth-generation farmer from Southwest Kansas. "It's tough to be the guy conserving water on your farm if your neighbors around you are pumping as aggressively as they can. The opportunity to intersect with a broad consortium is extremely powerful."

The initiative centers on sorghum's natural water use efficiency, leveraging its ability to produce competitive yields with about one-third less water than corn. But instead of simply encouraging farmers to grow more sorghum, the partnership takes a comprehensive systems approach that addresses market access, conservation practices, and financial incentives.

A cornerstone of the program involves developing the infrastructure and technical knowledge necessary to optimize sorghum utilization across the supply chain. This investment tackles critical barriers historically limiting sorghum adoption in certain market segments.

"For dairies, one thing to remember is that they're looking for different things from their crops than somebody who's maybe just feeding into an ethanol plant," said Hansel New, assistant vice president of sustainability strategy & programs at DFA. "They're feeding their animals, so first and foremost is the fiber digestibility of that product and the nutritional value of that product."

By addressing the specific needs of various end-users, the partnership creates new market opportunities that align economic interests with conservation goals. The initiative will conduct trials to optimize sorghum utilization in various applications, ensuring that all participants maintain productivity while shifting to more water-efficient inputs.

Perhaps most significant for farmers is the partnership's focus on developing financial incentives to support water conservation. The program aims to establish innovative funding mechanisms that compensate farmers for adopting water-smart practices—a critical consideration in today's challenging farm economy.

"Dairy farmers have been caring for their animals and the land for generations, and water conservation is an important part of that, with the average dairy recycling water about four times for different uses on the farm," said New. "Partnerships like this will build upon that foundation and allow our farm families to continue making progress on water conservation."

The partnership's ecological benefits extend far beyond individual farms. By promoting water-efficient cropping systems and conservation practices, the initiative aims to strengthen aquifers, enhance waterfowl habitats and support rural communities.

▲ NSP CEO Tim Lust speaks to the media at a press conference during Commodity Classic, announcing a new partnership. Also participating, from left to right, were Billy Gascoigne (Ducks Unlimited), Hansel New (DFA), and Matt Durler (NSP). (Photo by Jesse Harding Campbell)

"Our volunteers trust us as a science-based organization," said Billy Gascoigne, director of agriculture & strategic partnerships at Ducks Unlimited. "And our scientists have told us that when we send waterfowl up to the northern breeding grounds, fat and happy, in good body condition, they are much more successful on that nest in the springtime raising the next generation of birds."

The shallow water wetlands in sorghum country, particularly playa wetlands, provide crucial habitat and nutritional resources for migratory birds. By implementing conservation practices that support these ecosystems, sorghum farmers contribute to broader environmental goals while improving the financial sustainability of their operations.

"It's a fundamental need for us as an organization to work hand in hand with farmers and ranchers to find win-win solutions that work for conservation, work for production agriculture, and the communities that they both support," said Gascoigne. "It's a supply chain approach. It's a community approach, and we're just thankful to be a part of that."

The partnership emphasizes data-driven approaches to quantify both water conservation impacts and economic outcomes. By combining hydrology assessments, farmer records, and technology-driven monitoring, the program will measure the water conservation impact of transitioning to sorghum and other water-smart practices.

"Data is at the core of how we manage these outcomes," said Durler. "And once we have good data, we can tell the story of production agriculture to people that aren't in the room with us."

Research suggests that significant reductions in water usage could lead to sustainable aquifer levels in many areas, allowing high-value agriculture to continue in regions facing water challenges. NSP CEO Tim Lust has expressed how personal this issue is for many farmers. “My family is one of those that used to have irrigation, and now we don't. So, water is very real and personal for me in terms of what that means.”

For sorghum farmers, this partnership marks a major shift in how conservation is approached—moving from individual responsibility to collective action across the supply chain. By aligning economic incentives with environmental goals and involving stakeholders from farm to consumer, the initiative creates a framework where profitability and sustainability reinforce each other.

The partnership will roll out in strategic phases, beginning with research and pilot trials, followed by broader implementation and scaling. Initial efforts will focus on the Southern High Plains before expanding to other regions.

As water challenges intensify across agricultural regions, this collaborative approach offers a model for how strategic partnerships can transform resource constraints into opportunities for innovation, market development and long-term success. For sorghum farmers, it means a chance to lead in water conservation while strengthening market position and ensuring the viability of operations for generations to come.

India's Market for U.S. Sorghum:
Progress and Persistent Challenges

By Shelee Padgett, Sorghum Checkoff Director of Emerging Markets

India presents a high-growth potential market for U.S. sorghum due to its vast and growing population, expanding economy and increasing consumer demand. With approximately 18% of the world's population and projections to become the second-largest economy by 2075, India offers a long-term market opportunity for U.S. sorghum exporters. Despite the apparent demand, several significant trade barriers remain, slowing progress in market access.

India's changing demand for coarse grains

A pivotal shift occurred in 2024 when India became a net importer of coarse grains, a trend that signals a new normal for the country's agricultural sector. Historically, India has been largely self-sufficient in grain production, with domestic supplies meeting demand across key sectors such as ethanol, livestock and poultry feed. Rising demand from India's feed industry—one of the largest in the world—has outpaced local production, driving the need for increased imports. This shift reflects broader changes in India's agricultural landscape, including evolving dietary patterns, expanding livestock production and the growing role of commercial feed milling. As poultry, dairy and aquaculture industries continue to scale up, securing reliable sources of high-quality feed grains has become a pressing priority.

"U.S. sorghum is well-positioned to meet this demand, as it complies with India's strict non-GMO import regulations," said Ethan Miller, chairman of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. "The nutritional benefits of sorghum make it a logical choice for inclusion in India's feed industry. However, despite this alignment, structural trade barriers continue to restrict market access."

Key trade barriers: Tariffs and phytosanitary hurdles

One of the most significant obstacles to U.S. sorghum entering the Indian market is the high tariff rate. India imposes a 50% tariff on imported U.S. sorghum, making it one of the most restrictive markets globally. This substantial tariff limits the competitiveness of U.S. sorghum against domestically produced grains and imports from countries with lower tariffs.

In addition to tariffs, India enforces strict phytosanitary measures, further complicating trade efforts. A major issue is the lack of a published Pest Risk Assessment (PRA) for sorghum, creating a non-tariff barrier that must be addressed before exports can begin. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health

▲ NSP and USCP CEO Tim Lust visited MBS Hatcheries in Pollachi, Tamil Nadu, India. Joined by members of the USGC, NSP and USCP, the group celebrated Pongal–a traditional harvest festival–alongside local residents and families of MBS Hatcheries, enjoying a time of thanksgiving, community gathering and cultural connection.

▲ In January 2024, USCP and the U.S. Grains Council (USGC) traveled to India on an exploratory mission to expand opportunities for U.S. sorghum in industrial starch extraction, feed grain applications and ethanol production.

Inspection Service (APHIS) has submitted all required technical documentation, including an updated market access request in March 2025. However, progress has been delayed due to procedural complexities and India's protective approach to domestic agriculture.

Opportunities for growth and market entry strategies

India's need for feed grains and fuel production continues to grow, and U.S. sorghum has competitive attributes that align with India's import requirements, particularly its non-GMO status. Additionally, there is existing knowledge and recognition of sorghum within India that can facilitate easier market penetration once regulatory hurdles are overcome. To enhance market access, the sorghum industry, along with the U.S. Grains Council, is focusing on strategies to position sorghum as a key feed and fuel ingredient in India's growing agricultural sector. India's massive poultry and livestock industries, as well as its expanding ethanol sector, present the strongest opportunities for U.S. sorghum. The industry is working toward feed trials with major Indian feed millers to demonstrate sorghum's ability to be a solution for the country's potential feed grain shortages.

By integrating sorghum into India's feed supply chain and aligning with the country's ethanol production goals, stakeholders aim to establish a sustainable and mutually beneficial trade relationship. "India's rapidly growing demand for quality feed grains presents a tremendous opportunity for U.S. sorghum," said Norma Ritz Johnson, USCP executive director. "By demonstrating the value and versatility of sorghum through feed trials and strategic engagement, we are working to create long-term market opportunities that benefit both Indian producers and U.S. growers."

Sorghum education efforts

Still, despite the challenges, the sorghum industry continues to push forward, promoting U.S. sorghum as a solution. In early 2025, NSP and USCP completed a successful trade mission to India, promoting U.S. sorghum and engaging with key stakeholders. This mission underscored the importance of patience and consistent engagement in establishing long-term market access. Efforts to educate India's poultry industry have continued, highlighting sorghum as a valuable feed ingredient. The U.S. Grains Council, Kansas Sorghum and Kansas State University's IGP Institute led a training program to an Indian poultry team on incorporating sorghum into feed rations. These technical workshops and seminars helped decision-makers understand sorghum's benefits, including proper storage and processing techniques. An upcoming eight-week online course hosted at IGP will provide Indian feed industry stakeholders with in-depth technical training.

Looking ahead: The path forward

While progress in accessing India's market remains slow, the long-term potential makes the effort worthwhile. India's shift to a net importer of coarse grains highlights a growing need for reliable feed grain sources, and U.S. sorghum is well-positioned to fill this demand. Nevertheless, overcoming the significant trade barriers will require ongoing commitment, strategic partnerships and persistent engagement.

The message remains clear for U.S. sorghum growers and exporters: patience and presence are essential. By maintaining a strong diplomatic and industry-driven presence, the U.S. sorghum sector can continue making inroads into one of the world's most dynamic and rapidly expanding markets.

▲ During a recent joint officers' mission to India, leaders from the U.S. Grains Council (USGC), National Sorghum Producers (NSP), and the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) visited Shanthi Feeds Limited in Coimbatore.

Ethanol: Sorghum's Steady Market in Uncertain Times

By John Duff, Serō Ag Strategies

For almost two decades, ethanol has been one of the most reliable domestic markets for U.S. sorghum. Each year, ethanol producers use up to one-third of the nation's crop, offering a steady, value-added outlet for farmers across the Sorghum Belt. While export markets fluctuate with trade policies and global dynamics, ethanol plants have remained consistent buyers—providing dependable demand for growers.

While food aid is valuable, it accounts for less than 5% of total sorghum use. Ethanol, on the other hand, provides a long-term domestic market that anchors the industry. Each year, a dozen or so ethanol plants purchase enough sorghum to create a reliable base of demand. When export markets cool, these plants continue buying—helping stabilize prices and keep acres in production.

This dynamic creates a resilient marketplace where ethanol and exports complement each other. Domestic demand through ethanol ensures sorghum is not overly dependent on any one country or global event. That is a powerful insurance policy for growers.

Some ethanol producers are now using even more sorghum. With local supplies readily available—and Midwestern corn being more expensive to haul by comparison—many plants in the Sorghum Belt are turning to sorghum as their feedstock of choice. The reason is simple: Sorghum yields the same amount of ethanol per bushel as corn and produces similar distillers grains, an important coproduct used to feed livestock.

For grain-deficient regions like the Sorghum Belt—where there is more livestock than locally grown grain—this shift makes even more sense. Ethanol plants must import corn from the Midwest, adding transportation costs and logistical headaches. Locally sourced sorghum eliminates those challenges, giving ethanol producers a cost-effective alternative that supports nearby farms.

Unlike many other bio-based products that rely heavily on subsidies, ethanol has inherent value. It is the most cost-effective source of octane in today's fuel supply—making it a necessary component in gasoline. That built-in economic benefit means ethanol stands on its own. The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) may provide a demand floor, but ethanol's competitiveness comes from its market value—not government support.

That is why efforts to expand E15—gasoline blended with 15% ethanol—are so important. More E15 means more demand, and more demand means more opportunity for sorghum growers. The connection is direct and meaningful.

Farmers have long understood that ethanol is more than a bridge market—it is a cornerstone. In times of sluggish exports and shifting global politics, ethanol continues to reinforce the foundation of sorghum demand. The fuel is not just filling a gap; it is holding the market steady.

So while the headlines may focus on volatility, here is the truth: Ethanol is strong. Ethanol is stable. And for sorghum growers, ethanol is a market that is only growing more valuable.

KANSAS GRAIN SORGHUM
Growers Working Together

Sorghum *Update*

Brought to you by the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission

Writing India's Sorghum Story: A New Chapter for U.S. Growers

By Maddy Meier

As a Kansas sorghum grower, you are confidently cultivating more than acres in any given year; you are also cultivating new trading relationships through the work of your sorghum checkoff as you set your sights on global markets. India, the world's most populous nation, is brimming with opportunity and initiative for American-grown grain sorghum. With its growing population, favorable long-term demographics, and shifting needs across end-use sectors, India presents a significant market, and the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission is supporting timely developments to open this market for sorghum growers.

Brant Peterson, Chairman of the Commission from Stanton County, believes in India's potential and in the work of growers like him to gain market access there. "Kansas leads the United States in sorghum production, producing over half of the nation's bushels annually. Having an additional high-volume premium buyer to compete just as China has done so in recent years, will directly affect the sorghum crop basis and–bottom line–benefit Kansas growers." To understand where sorghum fits in, Kansas Sorghum staff interviewed farmers and experts on the impacts and successes of recent inbound and outbound Indian trade missions over the past year.

India's surging demand for coarse grains, driven by the expanding animal feed sector and diverse industrial applications such as ethanol, paints a compelling picture for Kansas sorghum. As Reece Cannady, U.S. Grains Council Regional Director for South Asia, put it on our latest Sorghum State Podcast two-part deep dive series on sorghum market access into India, "India is a partner that is ready and waiting... they acknowledge they need it and they actively ask for it." However, market access isn't simply a matter of supply and demand. It requires strategic planning, collaborative partnerships, and a deep understanding of the intricacies of international trade. That's where the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission steps in, acting as a vital bridge between producers and Indian consumers.

Demonstrating its commitment to fostering international trade relationships, the Commission helped host an inbound trade delegation last fall. The journey began with hands-on education and cultural exchanges. In collaboration with the International Grains Program (IGP) at Kansas State University, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP), the U.S. Grains Council (USGC), and the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission, the delegation immersed themselves in the world of the sorghum crop through a short course on sorghum milling, handling, storage, and end-use applications. This builds on an earlier exploratory mission to India organized by USCP, NSP, and USGC in January of 2024, which, as Cannady describes, was 'a crucial first step in understanding the Indian market'.

At the AgMark Terminal in Concordia, the delegation observed the cutting-edge technology ensuring the quality of Kansas sorghum exports. Kevin Kniebel, who serves as Vice Chairman of the Commission, welcomed the group to his family farm in White City, fostering genuine connection over a shared meal. The IGP Institute at Kansas State University provided in-depth training on sorghum's unique qualities and applications, specifically addressing India's growing need for poultry feed.

"When you sit across the table from someone, you're not just discussing commodities, you're creating a connection," said Kniebel. "They see firsthand how we produce quality sorghum, understand our commitment, and that strengthens the foundation of our trade relationship with India. It's those personal experiences, those shared moments on the farm, that truly resonate and drive long-term partnerships."

As Cannady noted on the Podcast, "India has always been positioned as a market of the future, and it still is. However, with current developments, India is certainly a market of today." This sentiment was echoed throughout the delegation's visit, culminating in a farewell dinner celebrating the burgeoning partnership and showcasing sorghum's culinary versatility. Key individuals from USCP, USGC, and the Commission played vital roles in this successful mission. This mission builds upon earlier trade exploratory efforts to India, a market deemed crucial due to its dynamic demographic growth. Those earlier efforts, partially funded by the Commission, laid the groundwork for this ongoing collaboration.

"After visiting with the trade team in Manhattan, it is clear their end users want U.S. sorghum," said Kevin Harris, who farms south of Abilene and serves as an officer on the Commission. "One member even told us that it is not a matter of if they will get U.S. sorghum, but when. I wouldn't be surprised if grain sorghum will be the first U.S. grain to be imported by India." The Commission along with USCP paves the way for enhanced market access, which these recent efforts are but one example. This journey signifies more than just trade; it represents a collaboration between Kansas and India, fostering economic growth, food security, and a shared future. And as Cannady confidently asserts, "For sorghum growers, India is the market. It's the place for them to be."

The Commission remains committed to navigating the logistical challenges and regulatory requirements that stand between Kansas sorghum and the Indian market, as shown within the words of Chairman Peterson: "When trade teams visit our Kansas growers, they see the pride we take in our crops, the quality we can deliver, the integrity each of us have, and our desire to forge lasting relationships."

SORGHUM CHECKOFF
NEWSLETTER
sorghumcheckoff.com | Spring Edition 2025

Sorghum – Can I Realistically Cut Costs in 2025?

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

This year presents unique challenges for farmers striving to turn a profit due to rising input costs and lower commodity prices. Recently, I wrote how sorghum has lower input costs compared to many other crops. For the sorghum farmer, there are potential areas where input costs could be trimmed further, however, these need to be considered strategically. By carefully evaluating hybrid selection, seed treatments, seeding rates, weed control and fertilizer application, savings may be achieved without sacrificing yield potential.

Sorghum seed is relatively inexpensive compared to other crops, and while the latest hybrids come at a premium, they often provide higher yields or valuable traits. For instance, if a new hybrid costs $25 more per bag (600,000 seeds), this translates to just over 4 cents per 1,000 seeds. For a grower planting 45,000 seeds per acre, the additional expense is only $1.87 per acre. Given the potential yield advantages of newer hybrids, cutting costs by choosing an older, cheaper variety may not be the best decision.

Most sorghum seed includes a base fungicide and a safener that enables the use of group 15 herbicides such as s-metolachlor, acetochlor and dimethenamid. Recently, systemic insecticide treatments have become more common, adding $30 to $65 per bag in costs. While these treatments were crucial when sorghum aphids posed a significant threat, the pest is now less problematic, often appearing later in the growing season when a seed treatment would no longer be effective. Chinch bugs, however, can be a major early-season issue in some areas. If your farm experiences early pest pressure from chinch bugs or other pests, an insecticide seed treatment is essential. Otherwise, skipping it could save as much as $4.90 at a 45,000 seed per acre seeding rate.

Seeding rates vary widely across the country and even from grower to grower in the same region. In seeding rate trials, it is often difficult to see a significant difference in yield without greatly varying the rate. This is because of sorghum's ability to tiller and produce more heads when planted at a low seeding rate, and its ability to produce more grain per head under favorable condi-

WHAT'S INSIDE

SORGHUM THE SMART CHOICE

tions. Many growers may benefit from reducing seeding rates by 10–20% without significantly affecting yield. For a seed bag cost of $170 and our example seeding rate of 45,000, this is a potential savings of $1.27 to $2.55 an acre. If you already plant at a low rate for your farm's potential, a seeding rate reduction may not be advisable.

Preemergence herbicide application is crucial for weed control in sorghum, but comparing costs of different products can lead to savings. For instance, two widely used premixes—atrazine plus s-metolachlor and atrazine plus acetochlor—offer similar weed control. A quick survey in my region indicated a price difference of up to $5.00 per acre between these options. When comparing herbicides, labels should be carefully examined for differences in formulation and active ingredient. A 2SC formulation requires double the rate of a 4SC formulated product. A good example of active ingredient differences is s-metolachlor vs metolachlor. Although similar, a product with metolachlor will generally require a higher rate compared to a s-metolachlor containing product to get the same results.

Improving nitrogen efficiency allows for reduced fertilizer rates without compromising yield. A split nitrogen application can enhance efficiency and reduce total nitrogen needs by up to 25%. Consider applying 50% of nitrogen preplant, some as a starter, and the remaining 25–45 days post-emergence. This approach not only improves uptake efficiency but also provides the flexibility to adjust nitrogen rates based on real-time crop conditions.

In a year where every dollar counts, smart, strategic decisions can help sorghum farmers manage input costs without jeopardizing productivity. Carefully assessing hybrid choices, reconsidering seed treatments, adjusting seeding rates, comparing herbicide prices and improving nitrogen use efficiency can collectively make a significant financial difference. By considering these targeted savings strategies, farmers can navigate economic challenges while maintaining strong yields. For more insights into sorghum's agronomy insights, visit the *www.sorghumcheckoff.com*.

Ethan Triplett Joins the Sorghum Checkoff as Crop Improvement Director

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) welcomes Dr. Ethan Triplett as its new crop improvement director, bringing extensive expertise in plant science, breeding and physiology to the organization. A native of Canyon, Texas, Triplett holds a Ph.D. in crop physiology from Texas Tech University and B.S. and M.S. degrees in plant science from West Texas A&M University. His background spans sorghum trait discovery, host-plant resistance mechanisms and entomology, making him a key asset in advancing sorghum's genetic potential.

In his new role, Triplett will lead efforts to enhance sorghum genetics, improve production sustainability and drive innovation in crop improvement. His work will focus on identifying early-stage opportunities for partnerships and technological advancements, ensuring sorghum remains a top choice for producers and industry stakeholders.

"Ethan's deep expertise in crop physiology and plant breeding aligns perfectly with our mission to advance sorghum's potential," said Norma Ritz Johnson, executive director of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. "His leadership will be instrumental in identifying cutting-edge innovations that strengthen sorghum's competitiveness and long-term viability."

Triplett is passionate about scientific innovation and its practical application in agriculture, and he is committed to supporting producers with research-driven solutions that enhance yield, resilience and profitability. His leadership in crop improvement will play a vital role in ensuring sorghum continues to thrive as a competitive and sustainable crop in today's agricultural landscape.

For more information on USCP's efforts in sorghum innovation and crop improvement, visit *www.sorghumcheckoff.com*.

First-Ever Sorghum Research Supplement in Journal of Food Science Fuels CPG Innovation

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) has reached a groundbreaking milestone with the publication of a special supplement in the *Journal of Food Science*, titled "Sorghum in Human Health." This first-of-its-kind compilation brings together extensive research on sorghum's nutritional benefits, solidifying its role as a powerful, health-promoting grain.

Funded by USCP, the supplement serves as a key resource for both food manufacturers and consumers, shedding light on sorghum's potential as a nutrient-rich ingredient. It emphasizes sorghum's unique benefits, including its ability to enhance diet quality, support overall health and thrive as a domestic, drought-tolerant crop.

"Sorghum provides a nutrient-dense food source for humans and should be considered as a key ingredient when developing new food products," said James Painter, PhD, RDN, the supplement's Guest Editor. "This compilation is designed to inspire food innovators to incorporate sorghum into a variety of new products."

The supplement features three pivotal research articles: "A Review of the Health Benefits and Food Science Applications of Sorghum," "Sorghum Phytonutrients and Their Health Benefits: A Systematic Review from Cell to Clinical Trials," and "Current and Potential Future Uses of Sorghum to Increase Nutrient Density for Human Foods."

These studies highlight sorghum's role in disease prevention and management, particularly for conditions like diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

"We are proud to showcase the rigorous research demonstrating sorghum's powerful health benefits," said Lanier Dabruzzi, MS, RD, LD, Director of Nutrition & Food Innovation at Sorghum Checkoff. "This supplement underscores sorghum's role in a 'food as medicine' approach to health and provides a roadmap for food manufacturers to integrate sorghum into their product portfolios."

For more insights into sorghum's health benefits and food innovation potential, visit *www.sorghumcheckoff.com*. To explore the full "Sorghum in Human Health" supplement, visit *https://ift.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/17503841/89/S1*.

2024/2025 U.S. Sorghum Crop Earns No. 1 Certification for Sixth Consecutive Year

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program is proud to share that the 2024-25 U.S. sorghum crop has received a No. 1 certification for the sixth consecutive year, according to the U.S. Grains Council's newly released Sorghum Quality Report. This achievement underscores the continued commitment of U.S. sorghum producers to delivering a high-quality, reliable product to buyers around the world.

The report includes analysis from samples collected across 22 counties in major sorghum-producing states. Results showed this year's crop had strong test weights, low levels of broken kernels and foreign material, and no detectable mycotoxins. Moisture content averaged 11.9 percent, with protein levels ranging from 11.1 to 13.2 percent, highlighting sorghum's strong nutritional profile.

These results demonstrate why U.S. sorghum is increasingly valued in global markets, especially in regions such as Asia and Mexico. Buyers turn to U.S. sorghum for its consistency, safety and versatility in applications ranging from livestock feed to food products and industrial uses.

The Sorghum Checkoff continues to invest in research, education and market development to ensure producers are equipped to meet growing international demand and elevate the crop's market presence.

With another year of top-tier quality, U.S. sorghum strengthens its position as a dependable grain of choice on the global stage.

To download the full 2024-25 Sorghum Quality Report, visit *grains.org/sorghum_report/2024-2025-sorghum-harvest-quality-report/.*

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

April 28-30	**Petfood Forum**	*Kansas City, Missouri*
May 26, July 4	**Memorial Day & Independence Day**	*Office Closed*
August 4-6	**USCP Board Meeting**	*TBD*

For more events, visit sorghumcheckoff.com/news-and-events/

SORGHUM THE SMART CHOICE

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USCP MISSION

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

@SorghumCheckoff

Sorghum Shortcuts

Expanding dual use for grain sorghum in the Great Plains

The Annual Forage insurance policy, introduced in 2014, has been a critical tool for producers growing annual crops for livestock feed, filling a gap in risk management for these operations. The 2018 farm bill expanded the policy, allowing producers to certify acres used for grazing and grain harvesting during the same growing season as "Dual Use." This option is available for Small Grains in qualifying counties across Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. For producers in the harsh, unpredictable climate of the Great Plains, the Annual Forage Dual Use option is both a sound agronomic practice and a proven way to lower risk.

While the Small Grains category includes several crops, the Dual Use option is primarily used for wheat production. Grain sorghum, managed similarly to wheat across the Great Plains, is not yet eligible for certification under this program. As persistent drought increases production challenges, sorghum forage is becoming the crop of choice for more producers. Over the ten years since the Annual Forage insurance was introduced, sorghum forage acreage has grown by more than 34%, highlighting its rising importance as a feed source. This trend suggests that expanding Annual Forage options to include sorghum would provide valuable risk management benefits.

If implemented, the expansion is projected to generate about $120 per acre for cow-calf operations using sorghum stover as fodder. Recognizing this potential, the National Sorghum Producers (NSP) is working with a leading private economic and agricultural risk consulting firm to engage the USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) and advance this initiative. Expanding Dual Use Annual Forage to sorghum would offer greater flexibility, stronger risk protection and improved profitability for producers across the region. This is an opportunity to enhance the value of sorghum in the Great Plains, and NSP is committed to making it a reality.

2025 Sorghum Yield Contest Opens May 1

The 2025 National Sorghum Producers Yield Contest kicks off May 1, giving growers an opportunity to increase yields, share management strategies and recognize top producers at the state and national levels.

To participate, contestants must be paid NSP members at the time of entry and harvest. Multiple family members may enter, but each must have a separate membership. Entries will be judged solely on yield, and national and state winners will be recognized at the 2026 Commodity Classic in San Antonio.

For official rules and the entry form, visit SorghumGrowers.com/yield-contest or contact NSP at 806-749-3478 or yieldcontest@sorghumgrowers.com.

Sorghum Foundation Scholarships Available

The National Sorghum Foundation has opened applications for three scholarships available to college students studying agriculture in the 2025-2026 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, 2025.

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.

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