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Summer 2025
Volume 19, Issue 3

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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 806-749-3478 or email our office at info@sorghumgrowers.com. For advertising, visit SorghumGrowers.com/advertise.

EDITOR UPDATE

Fueling the Future

If you're holding this magazine, you probably care about where your grain goes, and where this industry is headed. I'm honored to join you on the journey.

This is my first issue as editor of Sorghum Grower, and I couldn't have asked for a more fitting theme than **Fueling the Future**. As the new Communications Director at National Sorghum Producers, my background is rooted in storytelling. I am constantly telling stories from my time as a U.S. Marine, to launching a West Texas craft brewery, to building brands that connect with people. What drew me to NSP was the same thing that keeps me excited each day: producers with grit, purpose, and a product the world needs more of.

Right now, that product is fuel, clean, renewable, American-made fuel. Sorghum is no longer just part of the ethanol conversation, it's driving it. This issue dives into what that means. From the 45Z clean fuel tax credit to the new Renewable Volume Obligations, to export demand and global market development, the road ahead is opening quickly, and sorghum is leading the charge. These opportunities don't just matter in Washington or abroad, they ripple all the way back to the farm gate, shaping the future for growers across the Sorghum Belt.

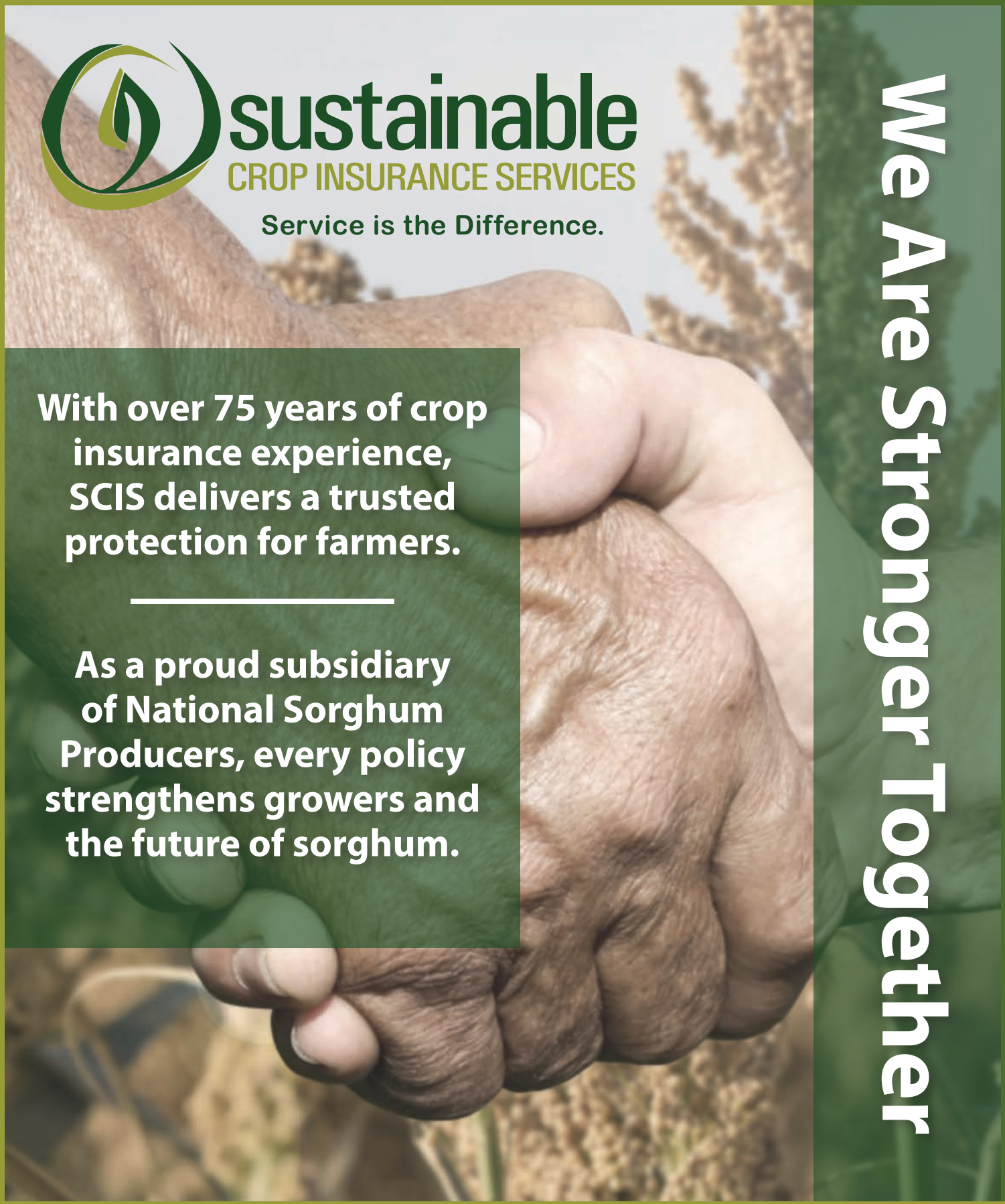
Inside, you'll hear from policy leaders, market analysts, global trade experts, and the growers at the center of it all. You'll also find some unexpected places where distilling and fuel overlap (hint: there's whiskey involved). It's proof that sorghum's story is still being written, and that innovation can spring from both policy shifts and small-town stills.

There's a lot to take in. But if you remember one thing from this edition, let it be this: the future of fuel starts in your field, and the world is taking notice.

Thanks for reading, and for letting me be part of this story.

Eric Washington

NSP Communications Director
Sorghum Grower Editor



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One Big Beautiful Bill Delivers Major Wins for Sorghum

By Sydney Lundberg, Combest, Sell & Associates

It's been a whirlwind in Washington since President Donald Trump's inauguration in January. The President and his team across the administration have delivered a surge of activity, drastically reshaping the landscape across the full scope and breadth of the federal government, including through immigration and border security, the federal workforce, trade policy, national defense, health and social policy, and much more. While a number of these changes have proved contentious, they reflect the administration's pledge to deliver on key campaign promises.

According to the Associated Press, rural American voters represented 44% of the electoral makeup that supported the President in his path back to the White House. This strong voter base, paired with the President's frequently stated support for America's farmers and ranchers, has uniquely positioned agriculture as a key player with the administration. As the President overhauls the nation's trade policy, these shifts have not been met without some apprehension from stakeholders, including agriculture, which depends heavily on exports and longstanding trade relationships. In any case, the Trump administration continues to promote a farmer-first policy agenda and has secured several crucial wins for rural America thus far in his second term.

On July 4, 2025, President Trump signed into law the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), a budget reconciliation measure dubbed "Farm Bill 1.0" by House Agriculture Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson (R-PA). The act delivers big wins for farmers: a stronger farm safety net, more risk management tools, new conservation funding, added support for research, and expanded trade promotion. Many of which were top priorities for sorghum growers, advanced by NSP leaders throughout the process.

Strengthened Support for Sorghum

OBBBA raises the statutory reference price for grain sorghum by more than 11% to $4.40 and improves the effective reference price formula from 85% to 88% of the five-year Olympic market average (capped at 113% of the statutory price). For 2025, this results in an effective reference price of $4.67.

ARC and PLC programs are updated with higher benchmark guarantees and maximum payments, while PLC calculations remain unchanged. Producers may still choose annually between ARC and PLC, but for 2025, they will receive the higher of the two. Notably,

▲ TALK CONTINUES ON a potential bi-partisan "skinny farm bill," with House Agriculture Chairman "GT" Thompson eyeing September for passage. Photo courtesy of House Ag Committee Democrats.

▲ PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act into law on July 4, 2025. Official White House Photo.

producers may now elect ARC even if the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) has been purchased.

Improved Crop Insurance Access

Crop insurance, the cornerstone of the farm safety net, receives meaningful improvements. Premium support rises 3–5 percentage points across coverage levels for Basic and Optional Units, and SCO premium support climbs from 65% to 80%.

Beginning farmers and ranchers now receive support for 10 years instead of five, with premium assistance starting at 15% in year one, tapering to 10% by year five, and holding steady through year 10.

Conservation Funding Secured

OBBBA averts the looming conservation funding cliff by establishing baseline support for EQIP, CSP, RCPP, and other widely used programs. As the Resource Conserving Crop®, sorghum plays a key role in stewardship, and these investments help ensure producers can keep building on conservation progress.

Tax Provisions

A major victory is the extension of the 45Z tax credit through 2029, with ILUC excluding CI calculations and incentives for domestic feedstocks in ethanol production. Learn more about this on page 12.

Broader tax wins include permanent estate tax relief (raised to $15 million for individuals, $30 million for joint filers, indexed for inflation), higher Section 179 expensing limits, permanency of the 20% Section 199A deduction, 100% bonus depreciation, full deductibility of R&D, and lower marginal rates.

Expanded Trade Promotion

The act created a new agricultural trade program that will begin in 2027 with $285 million in funding. Modeled after the Market Access (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) programs, it will help expand consumer markets and build long-term export demand. With 60% of U.S. sorghum exported each year, this investment strengthens existing markets while creating new opportunities.

Additional Producer Relief

Under Secretary Brooke Rollins, USDA has also streamlined program delivery. Nearly $31 billion in disaster assistance was authorized in December 2024 under the American Relief Act and is now being distributed across the Sorghum Belt through ECAP, ELRP, and SDRP - providing timely relief during difficult market conditions.

At its core, farming is about resilience, hard work, and fair competition. When markets reward these values, farmers succeed. With an updated safety net secured, the focus now turns to high-growth, high-value markets for sorghum, both at home and abroad.

Fueling Momentum for America's Sorghum Farmers

By Jesse Harding Campbell, Marsh Wren Creative

As summer gives way to harvest, National Sorghum Producers have been focused on supporting growers and shaping the future of sorghum. From advocacy efforts in Washington to sharing market insights at industry events, NSP continues to work on behalf of farmers nationwide. With growers preparing their entries for the National Sorghum Yield Contest, NSP is also reflecting on 70 years of service to members and the broader sorghum community. It has been a season of activity, reflection, and anticipation for what lies ahead.

In July, the NSP executive committee traveled to Washington, D.C., for the annual summer fly-in. These visits are a cornerstone of advocacy, giving growers the opportunity to meet with lawmakers and agency officials. Discussions focused on farm bill priorities, crop insurance, conservation programs, and the importance of maintaining open and competitive international markets for U.S. sorghum.

"The fly-in is really about building relationships. Having the opportunity to sit across the table from lawmakers makes a big difference. It puts a face to the sorghum industry in a way that emails and phone calls just can't," said NSP Chair Amy France. "That face-to-face time allows us to share not only our own perspectives, but also the voices and experiences of sorghum growers across the country. Building those connections in person helps ensure sorghum farmers remain part of the conversation."

Insights from HPJ Live

NSP Past Chair Craig Meeker and CEO Tim Lust took the stage at HPJ Live in Wichita, Kan., for a fireside chat on the future of sorghum markets.

Domestically, sorghum is playing an increasing role in home-grown biofuels, particularly ethanol production. Its adaptability and efficiency make it a valuable feedstock for renewable energy, supporting U.S. energy independence while providing additional markets for farmers. Forage markets in the beef and dairy industries also offer growing opportunities as livestock producers seek resilient, water-efficient feed sources.

Internationally, NSP is focused on markets in China, India, Mexico, and Spain - countries that reflect both historical purchasers and emerging growth. Expanding these relationships is critical to creating demand and increasing pricing for reliable, high-quality grain.

"Without China, it hurts," said Meeker. "Trade remains critical, and NSP is actively working on all fronts to influence the factors that affect price; whether through trade policy, domestic programs, or other policies that impact the market."

▲ THE HPJ LIVE agenda featured remarks from NSP Leaders Craig Meeker (left) and Tim Lust (right). Photo courtesy of High Plains Journal.

▲ NSP REPRESENTATIVES VISITED elected officials in July to discuss key sorghum priorities. Top: Rep. Tracey Mann, R-Kan. Bottom: Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan. Right: Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kan.

Team Sorghum at the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council

Building on these market efforts, Team Sorghum joined members and staff of the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council (USGBC) in Grand Rapids, Mich., for the Council's 65th Annual Board of Delegates Meeting. Members approved a name change from the U.S. Grains Council to the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council, reflecting the organization's expanded focus on bio-based products.

USGBC Chairwoman Verity Ulibarri, a sorghum producer from New Mexico, completed her term as Chair and now serves as Past Chairwoman. A strong voice for agriculture and an advocate for sorghum, she has helped guide the Council's work to grow international markets, promote innovation, and strengthen the U.S. grains and bio-products industry.

Lust was also recognized with a commemorative plaque honoring 30 years of membership and involvement, highlighting his decades of dedication to advancing the sorghum industry and expanding global opportunities for U.S. farmers.

▲ VERITY ULIBARRI, USGBC past chairwoman and New Mexico sorghum producer, at the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council board meeting. Photo courtesy of USGBC.

Enter the 2025 Sorghum Yield Contest

As growers look ahead, the National Sorghum Yield Contest provides an opportunity to showcase innovation and production excellence across diverse regions.

For 2025, NSP introduced a new verification option. This allows growers to choose between two protocols, including one that does not require a supervisor to be physically present. This option makes participation more accessible while maintaining fairness and integrity.

"We've already started receiving entries for the contest, and I'm excited to see how the season unfolds," said Lust. "I encourage all growers to submit their entries and see how they measure up against their peers."

The contest is open to both dryland and irrigated producers nationwide, and entries must be submitted online by November 26, 2025. Winners in each division will be recognized at the 2026 Commodity Classic in San Antonio on Thursday, February 26, 2026.

Submit your entry today at SorghumGrowers.com/YieldContest.

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2025 National Sorghum Yield Contest
Entry Deadline: November 26, 2025

National Sorghum Yield Contest Gala & PAC Casino Night
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Commodity Classic, San Antonio, Texas

Celebrating 70 Years Together

NSP will mark 70 years of service to America's sorghum farmers this December. For seven decades, the organization has stood shoulder to shoulder with growers, advocating for policies, expanding markets, and providing programs that support and strengthen the industry.

In the months ahead, NSP will share stories that highlight the people, moments, and achievements that have shaped the sorghum community. These reflections honor the past while looking forward to the next seventy years of innovation, growth, and opportunity.

NSP also wants to hear from members. What has the organization meant to your farm, family, or community? Share your memories and reflections by contacting ericw@sorghumgrowers.com.

From shaping farm policy in Washington to strengthening global markets and celebrating farmer innovation at home, NSP remains focused on securing a strong future for sorghum. As the organization prepares to celebrate 70 years of service, its mission remains the same: to stand with growers, amplify their voices, and champion opportunities that build value across the sorghum industry.

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▲ FROM THE FIELD to the ethanol plant, sorghum is helping farmers earn more from their grain while supporting sustainable, low-carbon fuel production. Photo by David Halloran

Sorghum's Biofuel Breakthrough

By John Duff, Serō Ag Strategies

This moment has been decades in the making. Just like the early ethanol industry in the upper Midwest, barnyard ethanol plants across the High Plains began grinding small volumes of sorghum in the 1980s, quietly proving The Resource-Conserving Crop®'s value as a viable biofuel feedstock. By 2012, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognized sorghum ethanol as an advanced biofuel under the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). Since then, sorghum has played a central role in the feedstock strategies of key ethanol plants across Kansas and Texas.

Fast forward a decade, and ethanol plants now use up to one-third of the U.S. crop. This steady demand supports price and market access regardless of what is happening with exports or feed demand. Roughly a dozen ethanol plants regularly grind sorghum. Some use it exclusively, while others switch to sorghum when market conditions are right. Most of these plants are in Kansas and Texas, but plants in Colorado, Nebraska, Missouri, and South Dakota buy sorghum from time to time.

Today, as the ethanol industry shifts towards America-focused and resource-conscious policy and consumer preference, sorghum's natural strengths are getting renewed attention. With the Clean Fuels Production Credit and other policies firmly in place or just over the horizon, this is sorghum's biofuel moment. It is the culmination of decades of under-the-radar innovation, agronomic advances, and strategic investment.

New Value for The Resource-Conserving Crop®

"When you look at ethanol's role in our economy and rural communities, it's really about self-reliance," said Amy France, a farmer from Scott City, Kan., and NSP chairwoman. "It means producing our own fuel right here at home and creating more opportunities for farmers to add value to their grain. That's energy independence for the country and new markets for our farms. It's a true win-win."

That value is only growing with the rollout of the Clean Fuel Production Credit, a tax credit created by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and strengthened by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). In short, this credit rewards ethanol producers for lowering the carbon intensity (CI) of their fuel. The cleaner the fuel, the bigger the credit - up to $1.00 per gallon.

For farmers, this presents a unique opportunity. At the core of the credit, known informally as 45Z, is a simple principle: cleaner fuels should be worth more. The credit uses CI to quantify how much greenhouse gas is released from start to finish - from the field where the feedstock is grown, to the plant where it is produced, to the engine where the fuel is burned.

Sorghum has a head start thanks to its ability to thrive with minimal water and fertilizer. Its deep root systems reduce erosion and help store carbon in the soil, meaning lower emissions from the field. Plus, most sorghum is grown using no-till and reduced-till systems. All of this lowers on-farm emissions, which helps bring down the CI score of the ethanol it produces, unlocking more value under 45Z.

"Nobody does sustainability better than U.S. farmers," said France. "Sorghum growers have been putting in the work for years, and now there's finally a way to get recognized and rewarded for it."

Many ethanol producers have publicly committed to sharing the value of 45Z with farmers who provide grain produced using conservation practices. This could come in the form of premiums or revenue-sharing agreements. The final benefit to farmers will depend on plant economics and final IRS guidance, but early projections indicate a significant bump in value per bushel.

"We see this as an opportunity to partner more closely with our growers," said Derek Peine, CEO of Western Plains Energy in Oakley, Kan., and Renewable Fuels Association vice chairman. "We're building the infrastructure to track carbon intensity from the field to the tank. The cleaner the grain, the higher the value, so we want to return as much of that value as possible to the farmer. In a way, they're our partners in this program."

Peine's plant is a regular buyer of sorghum and already operates multiple advanced energy systems inside the facility. These systems help cut emissions even further, strengthening the company's ability to earn maximum value under 45Z. With low-CI grain, doing so may be just within reach.

"Certain practices affect the CI score of the finished fuel pretty significantly," said Peine. "The good news is a lot of those practices aren't hard to do. And for many of our sorghum farmers, it really just means formalizing what they're already doing."

NSP has already begun building a framework to help growers prepare. Through its Advancing Markets for Producers grant, the organization has been working with ethanol plants and farmers since early 2023 to align data systems and prepare for CI tracking. This work, in many ways, laid the groundwork for 45Z implementation and will enable ethanol plants to better compensate sorghum farmers for using conservation practices.

"We're not asking growers to become accountants," said France. "We're asking them to keep doing what they do best - farm smart and responsibly. I'm proud of our NSP team, who can turn boot boxes of paperwork into real data for the supply chain and the government to give farmers the credit they deserve."

▲ ETHANOL IS TRANSPORTED from plants across the High Plains to meet rising demand for cleaner fuels. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council.

▲ THE 45Z CLEAN FUEL PRODUCTION CREDIT rewards ethanol plants for producing lower-carbon fuel. By using conservation-minded practices, farmers can help reduce carbon intensity, potentially increasing their ethanol partners' credit, and creating opportunities for additional compensation. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council.

The national shift toward low-CI fuel is no longer a dream. With 45Z, the value farmers create through good land stewardship now carries recognized value to society via the tax code. For sorghum producers, this is a bridge to a brighter future.

Looking Ahead to New Demand

Alongside the benefits of 45Z, and thanks to extensive work by NSP dating back to 2011, sorghum is recognized as an advanced biofuel feedstock under the RFS. Now, a favorable regulatory change included in the 45Z rulemaking may make capturing the value of that designation more attainable than ever.

Advanced biofuel status is currently worth approximately $0.05 per gallon or $0.15 per bushel. When paired with 45Z, this value may put some farmers in a position to market sorghum at a premium to corn. The value also strengthens the business case for ethanol plants located in the Sorghum Belt.

"We're seeing growing global demand for low-CI fuels, and we see High Plains sorghum playing a key role in meeting that demand," said Tom Willis, CEO of Conestoga Energy Partners in Liberal, Kan., NSP board director, and Growth Energy chairman. "This is an industry-wide momentum shift, and we're just getting started."

Willis also praised the Trump Administration's aggressive Renewable Volume Obligation (RVO) proposal for 2026 and 2027. If finalized, the rule would require a significant increase in renewable fuel blending - including advanced biofuels made from sorghum, which can be produced and sold at a premium.

"We appreciated the RVO, and we're also pushing hard for year-round E15," said Willis. "Ethanol is a critical tool for American energy independence, and the larger our share of the gas tank, the safer our country. Between new demand and 45Z, we're looking at an entirely new way of doing business."

E15, a gasoline blend containing 15% ethanol, is another driver of opportunity. Today, almost 3,000 stations across 31 states offer E15. Lifting outdated restrictions on summer sales of ethanol would open the door to expanded blending, especially in rural areas, and bolster demand. Ethanol and agriculture groups hope to see legislation enabling year-round sales later in the 119th Congress.

For decades, sorghum quietly built its case as a resource-conserving biofuel feedstock. Now, that case is being heard loud and clear in policy circles, global markets, and rural communities right here in the Sorghum Belt. The Clean Fuel Production Credit marks a turning point in how value is measured, rewarding the very conservation practices sorghum farmers have used all along. Paired with advanced biofuel status and rising demand at home and abroad, it's clear: sorghum's biofuel moment has arrived.

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▲ PROPOSED RVO INCREASES could expand access to E15 and E85 blends, creating added value for sorghum farmers. Photo by Jesse Harding Campbell, Marsh Wren Creative.

RVOs Signal Rising Demand for Sorghum Ethanol

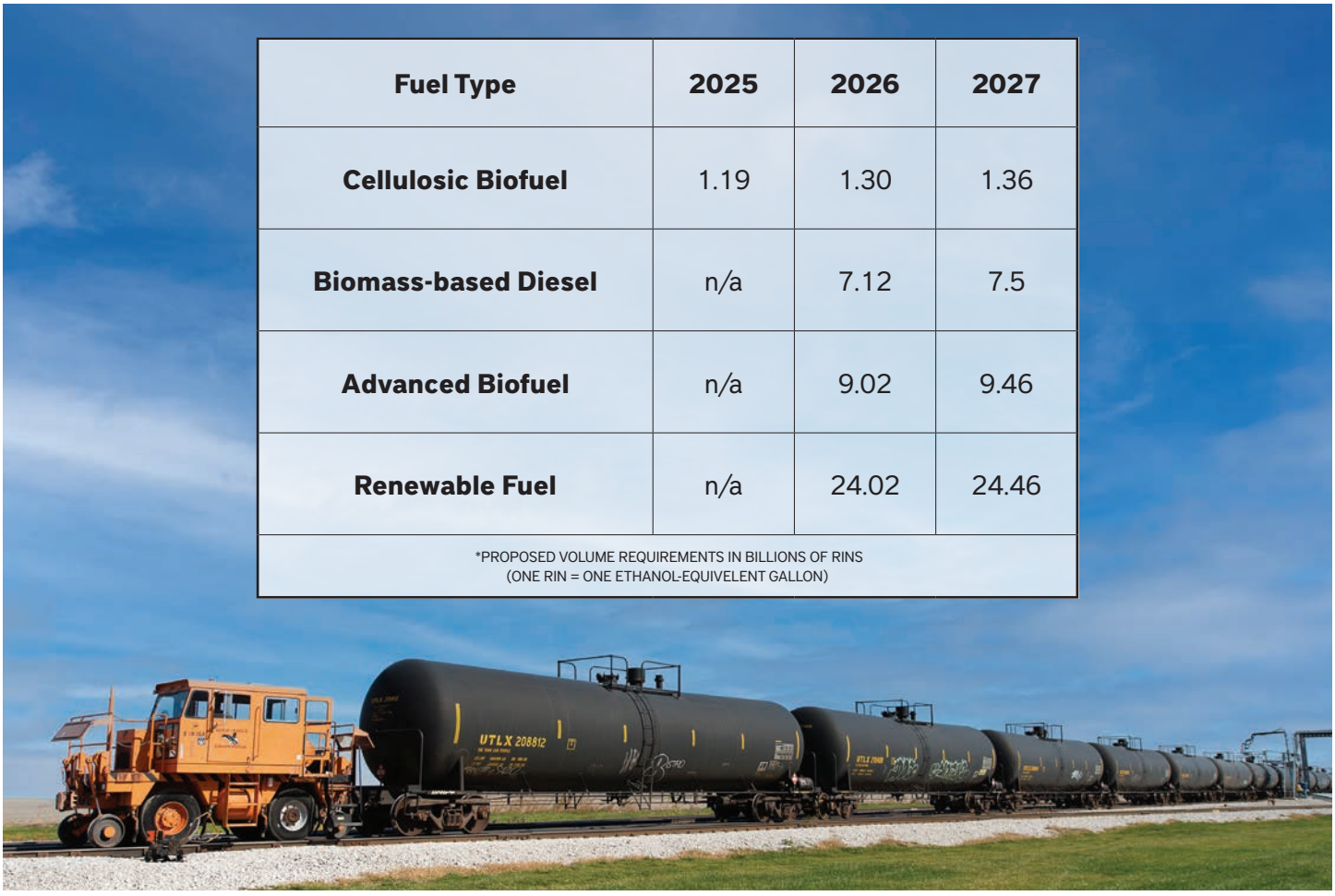
By John Duff, Serō Ag Strategies

The proposed Renewable Volume Obligations (RVOs) for 2026 and 2027 represent a major signal for the U.S. ethanol industry, and for the sorghum farmers who support it. RVOs, set by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are the backbone of the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). They establish annual targets for how much renewable fuel must be blended into the U.S. gasoline and diesel supply. These numbers shape every part of the biofuel economy, from ethanol plant production decisions to farm-level planting and global investment strategies.

For the broader ethanol industry, high and stable RVOs provide momentum and predictability. They send a clear market signal that federal policy continues to support the growth of homegrown fuels. Increased targets give biofuel producers the confidence to invest in new technology, expand capacity, and diversify feedstocks. For farmers, higher RVOs ultimately mean increased crop demand, expanded marketing options, and stronger prices.

The EPA's proposed blending targets include 15 billion gallons of conventional ethanol each year, plus 9.02 billion gallons of advanced biofuels in 2026 and 9.46 billion gallons in 2027.

This increase in advanced biofuel requirements is especially significant for the sorghum industry. Corn starch-based ethanol is not allowed to qualify as an advanced biofuel under the RFS, but sorghum-based



Fuel Type	2025	2026	2027
Cellulosic Biofuel	1.19	1.30	1.36
Biomass-based Diesel	n/a	7.12	7.5
Advanced Biofuel	n/a	9.02	9.46
Renewable Fuel	n/a	24.02	24.46

*PROPOSED VOLUME REQUIREMENTS IN BILLIONS OF RINS
(ONE RIN = ONE ETHANOL-EQUIVELENT GALLON)

▲ THE EPA'S PROPOSED RVOs for 2026-2027 signal strong federal support for both conventional and advanced biofuels, an encouraging development for sorghum-based ethanol. Source: EPA Photo courtesy of USGBC.

ethanol can - creating extra value for every gallon. Today, that added value means $0.05 per gallon or $0.15 per bushel.

The premium is tied to the spread between D5 and D6 Renewable Identification Numbers (RINs), a unique 38-digit code assigned to each gallon of renewable fuel produced. D6 RINs are assigned to corn starch-based ethanol gallons. D5 RINs are assigned to advanced biofuel gallons, including sorghum ethanol. Because fewer gallons of advanced biofuel are produced, D5 RINs are less common and thus more valuable.

A multitude of factors drive RIN prices, and forecasting their future value is difficult. Long-term trends and compliance requirements suggest the price gap between D5 and D6 RINs will likely stay consistent. Since 2010, the average spread has been $0.18 per gallon. That makes $0.10–$0.20 per gallon a reasonable estimate for sorghum's future advantage, or about $0.29–$0.58 per bushel.

While sorghum qualifies as an advanced biofuel feedstock, capturing that premium isn't always straightforward. Under current rules, ethanol plants must also invest in additional greenhouse gas-reducing technologies to qualify, and doing so is no small undertaking.

Thanks to a favorable regulatory change made during the Clean Fuel Production Credit (also known as 45Z) rulemaking, sorghum should now qualify on its own. If confirmed by the EPA, plants could unlock the $0.10–$0.20 per gallon premium simply by grinding sorghum. No added technology would be required, and that could drive significantly more demand for sorghum from ethanol plants.

Still, work remains. The RVOs are just a proposal for now, and opposition is expected during the public comment period. While the proposal is a strong step in the right direction, the EPA must follow through in order to drive long-term structural demand.

Current signals make it clear that the Trump Administration is pushing for increased blending of renewable fuels in the future. The message from sorghum farmers is just as strong: with the right policy signals, sorghum farmers will not only participate in the future of fuels; they will define it.

Making 45Z Work on Your Operation

By John Duff, Serō Ag Strategies

Farmers using sustainable practices could soon see a return beyond the soil. The Clean Fuel Production Credit, known as 45Z, is a tax credit rewarding ethanol plants up to $1.00 per gallon for lowering the carbon intensity (CI) of the fuels they produce. Created by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in 2022 and strengthened by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) in 2025, it rewards cleaner fuel production and opens the door for farmers to benefit.

Although ethanol plants claim the credit, farming practices affect the fuel's CI score, giving growers a potential way to earn for resource-saving practices they already use. Garrett Love, a sorghum farmer from Montezuma, Kan., calls the approach long overdue.

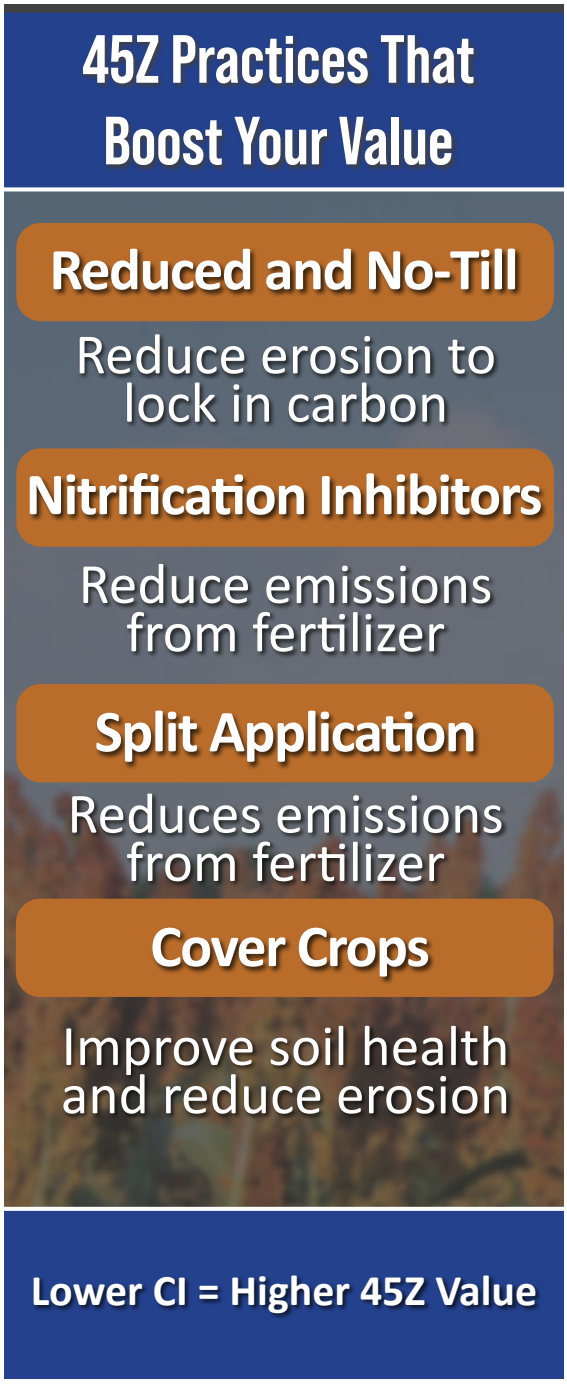
"We've been implementing conservation practices like no-till, cover crops, and precision nutrient management for years because they improve soil health and long-term profitability," said Love, who also serves as NSP vice chairman. "What's exciting about 45Z is that it connects those agronomic decisions to real market value in the low-carbon fuel space. It frames the conversation not just as stewardship, but as a strategy for farmers to enter the energy economy."

With the program's complexity, farmers might wonder how to make 45Z work for them. It starts by understanding what affects a fuel's CI score and how on-farm decisions can improve it.

Key farm practices include tillage systems, cover crops, timing of nutrient applications, and the use of nitrification inhibitors. In short, practices that improve nutrient use efficiency and reduce fuel use help lower CI under 45Z.

Geography also plays a role. The county in which the farm is located affects the baseline CI score due to differences in soil types, rainfall, and expected benefits of conservation practices. While growers can't control where their farms are, they should be aware of how it influences the grain's CI score and credit's potential payoff.

"We're focused on making a seemingly complicated program as accessible as possible for growers," said Brandt Underwood, Advancing Markets for Producers (AMP) director of measurement and verification. "That means helping producers implement the practices and



▲ NO-TILL SORGHUM HELPS reduce fuel use and improve soil health, driving CI reductions for the 45Z Clean Fuel Production Credit.

making sure they can document those practices in ways that meet verification standards."

Documentation is critical. To claim the 45Z credit, ethanol plants must verify the environmental performance of the grain they purchase, either directly or through a third party. This includes records on tillage frequency, nitrogen application timing, and several other key field-level practices.

"For some producers, this will mean adopting better recordkeeping tools or working more closely with agronomists and consultants," said Underwood. "The last thing anyone wants is to burden farmers with paperwork. The goal is to help them capture value for the practices they're already using, and we're ready to support them however we can."

Underwood, a former conservation agronomist with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), emphasized that many sorghum farmers are already well-positioned to participate. For those needing to adopt new practices, NRCS programs can be stacked to help fund transitions.

Participating in 45Z requires clear communication with ethanol plants. Since many grain systems cannot yet track CI scores and documentation efficiently, farmers must understand each plant's data needs to align records and practices with verification requirements and specific goals.

"45Z creates a unique opportunity for deeper alignment between farmers and ethanol plants," said Love. "For it to work, we'll need voluntary, incentive-based data sharing, transparency, and mutual trust around field-level practices and CI scores. If we get that right, it means a long-term competitive advantage for sorghum farmers and American agriculture."

Fueling Global Demand for U.S. Ethanol and Sorghum

By Faith Geistweidt

In the push toward a more sustainable future, ethanol remains a cornerstone of America's renewable fuel strategy. It helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions, provides a reliable domestic energy source, and offers economic benefits for rural communities. However, here at home, the fuel has hit a ceiling, both functionally and statutorily. Known as the blend wall, this cap limits how much ethanol can be blended into U.S. gasoline, typically maxing out at around 10%.

Despite interest in E15 and E85 fuels and the rollout of flex-fuel vehicles, infrastructure gaps, regulatory barriers, and fuel compatibility issues have slowed domestic growth. As a result, ethanol use in the U.S. has plateaued, making global markets more important than ever.

Just as sorghum growers rely on international grain markets, ethanol producers are increasingly reliant on global demand. This is where international trade and market development efforts become essential.

The U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council (USGBC), formerly known as the U.S. Grains Council (USCG), has led the charge in promoting American ethanol abroad, and it is paying off. Through trade missions, technical training, policy dialogue, and market access development, their efforts have built lasting partnerships in over 60 countries.

"Expanding international ethanol markets is critical for adding value to U.S. sorghum," said Shelee Padgett, director of emerging markets and grower leader development at the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. "With domestic demand from ethanol facing blend wall limitations, global trade provides the opportunity to keep our industry growing."

Padgett noted that U.S. sorghum brings unique strengths to the table, making it highly sought-after abroad.

"Sorghum is a dependable, sustainable, and reliable feedstock," said Padgett. "As more countries implement clean fuel policies, we have a real opportunity to position American sorghum as part of that global energy solution."

In the 2023/2024 marketing year, U.S. ethanol exports surpassed 1.7 billion gallons, major destinations including Canada, the European Union, Colombia, and India. These markets are not just big, they are increasingly focused on climate and carbon reduction goals, giving U.S. ethanol and sorghum a competitive edge.

Where does American sorghum fit into this global biofuel picture?

In many commodity markets, sorghum often competes with corn and other grains, making it difficult to stand out. But in sustainability-focused ethanol production, sorghum offers a distinct, and potentially lucrative, advantage.

One of the most promising opportunities is in the European biofuel markets. The EU classifies some feedstocks as "intermediate crops" with a low risk of causing

▲ JEREMY MALL, MARKET development lead at Murex (third from left), tours an Alco Energy ethanol plant in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of a USGBC trade mission in 2023. Photo courtesy of USGBC.

> *"One (European Renewable Energy Directive) RED official told me, 'This is exactly the kind of crop we want to support in our biofuel policy.' That's when I knew sorghum ethanol had a real shot at standing out globally."*
>
> — Jeremy Mall

▲ IN 2024, A record 12% of U.S. ethanol production was exported, according to the Renewable Fuels Association. Photo by Art Wager/iStock.

indirect land use change (ILUC). That designation can unlock premiums in carbon-sensitive fuel markets.

ILUC emissions occur when land used for food or feed is repurposed for fuel, pushing agriculture into carbon-rich ecosystems like forests. The science behind ILUC remains debated, but the policy focus is clear: markets like the EU want to avoid it. Feedstocks with low ILUC risk are in high demand.

Sorghum's potential designation as a low ILUC risk crop could provide a competitive edge, unlocking export access unavailable to higher-risk feedstocks. "I've been working in ethanol since 2005, and I've seen firsthand how sorghum can play a critical role in the future of low-carbon fuel," said Jeremy Mall, market development lead at Murex. "Sorghum thrives where other crops do not, in hot, dry, low rainfall areas, and that makes it a perfect match for sustainable ethanol production".

Mall also highlighted U.S. sorghum's appeal on a recent trade mission.

"On a trade mission with the U.S. Grains (& BioProducts) Council, I showed European regulators a Dust Bowl era map overlaid with the United States sorghum producing regions," said Mall. "One (European Renewable Energy Directive) RED official told me, 'This is exactly the kind of crop we want to support in our biofuel policy.' That's when I knew sorghum ethanol had a real shot at standing out globally."

These attributes give U.S. sorghum ethanol producers a chance to compete in premium export markets. But the opportunity comes with challenges.

Country-specific tariffs, shifting biofuel regulations, and labeling rules can slow exports and make long-term contracts difficult. In Mexico, regulatory uncertainty has affected the rollout of E10 blends. In the EU, strict sustainability criteria make it hard for U.S. ethanol producers to consistently qualify without full supply chain transparency.

Looking forward, there's a clear path for U.S. sorghum to carve out a premium position in the global ethanol marketplace. To get there, producers, exporters, and advocates must continue highlighting U.S. sorghum's agronomic strengths, environmental benefits, and policy advantages. That includes collaborating with the USGBC, pursuing certification programs, and educating global buyers on sorghum's advantages.

As trade policies evolve and sustainability standards tighten, sorghum must be positioned not just as a feedstock, but as a resource-efficient, globally competitive solution. The crop has the agronomic and environmental credentials. Now, it's about telling the story clearly, consistently, and globally.

And that's exactly where the sorghum industry excels.

Sorghum Neat: How Long Dog Distilling Is Turning Red Milo into a Distinctive Whiskey

By Eric Washington

In the heart of southern Nebraska, where dryland farming is both a challenge and a tradition, a partnership between farmer Joshua Becker and distiller Ryan Hanzlick is putting sorghum into an unexpected spotlight. The result: Blackbird Milo Whiskey, a craft spirit made from 100 percent grain sorghum, aged in new charred oak barrels and already turning heads for its distinctive flavor.

For the team at Long Dog Distilling, the whiskey began as an experiment. For Becker, an NSP member, it was a chance to see his crop take on a new identity. Together, they've created a product that not only showcases sorghum's versatility but also ties a local farm directly to a craft distillery.

The Idea Takes Root

Hanzlick credits Becker with sparking the project. "Ryan came to us about making whiskey from milo," Becker recalled. "He had the idea, and we had the grain and the mill to make it happen."

Becker farms with his wife Amanda, his father and two uncles, raising corn, wheat, soybeans, and sorghum across dryland acres near Beaver City. For the Beckers, sorghum is an essential part of a rotation designed to manage both weather and soil health. "Crop rotation is key for us, especially in a dryland system," Becker said. "Milo gives us a reliable option that helps protect against drought and disease while keeping our soils healthy."

When Hanzlick approached Becker with the idea of making a whiskey from red milo, the timing was right. The Beckers had a Channel 6B-95 hybrid planted, a red variety known for its depth of flavor. That grain became the foundation for what would become Blackbird Milo Whiskey.

A Distiller's Perspective

For Hanzlick, who has been building Long Dog Distilling with an eye toward quality and craftsmanship, the experiment was worth the risk. "I didn't really understand why nobody was making whiskey with milo," he

▲ BLACKBIRD MILO WHISKEY aging in new charred oak barrels at Long Dog Distilling in Nebraska. The sorghum-based spirit is already drawing attention for its distinctive flavor.

"From the field to the glass, it's rewarding to see how much potential this crop has."

— Joshua Becker

▲ BLACKBIRD MILO WHISKEY, crafted from 100 percent Nebraska-grown red milo, highlights sorghum's versatility in premium spirits.

said. "People use rye, wheat, oats — you name it. I figured maybe it just didn't work well. But we put a few barrels away, and when we tasted them a couple of years later, it turned out to be pretty good."

The whiskey is made with a 100 percent milo mash bill and aged in new charred oak barrels, a decision Hanzlick says made all the difference. "It's got some spice similar to rye," he said. "To me, it holds up better than a lot of single-grain corn whiskey."

From the Field to the Glass

For Becker, the process has been as fascinating as the result. "It's neat to see all of the different products that can be made from a grain grown here on the farm," he said. "Different strengths, different ages, different processes — each creates a unique result. It really shows how versatile sorghum can be."

That versatility is something both Becker and Hanzlick believe more people should know about. Sorghum has long been valued as a drought-tolerant crop with uses ranging from livestock feed to ethanol production, but its potential in food and beverage markets is still emerging.

"The whiskey shows that sorghum has more to offer," Becker said. "It's rewarding to see a crop we've grown for years take on a whole new life."

Building for the Future

Though the first batch of Blackbird Milo Whiskey was limited, Hanzlick plans to continue production and keep it in rotation. More barrels are already aging, and the early response has been encouraging.

"Whiskey takes time, and we want to do it right," Hanzlick said. "But the potential is there, and it's exciting to think about where it could go."

In fact, Hanzlick has begun offering custom barrels for groups interested in seeing their own sorghum turned into whiskey. Associations, co-ops, or even groups of growers can provide the grain, and Long Dog Distilling will age a barrel for them. "It's another way to connect the farmer to the final product," he said.

A New Chapter for Sorghum

For sorghum growers, Blackbird Milo Whiskey is more than a novelty; it's a proof point that the crop can compete in new markets and capture the imagination of consumers. It's also a reminder that innovation often begins close to home.

"Milo makes good whiskey," Hanzlick said simply. "It deserves a place in the conversation."

KANSAS GRAIN SORGHUM
Growers Working Together

Sorghum *Update*

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CSIP 2.0: An Impact Like No Other

By Maddy Meier

Time spent with leadership and staff of Kansas Sorghum quickly surfaces one topic: the Collaborative Sorghum Investment Program, otherwise known as CSIP. With the CSIP platform securing a multi-million investment of $5.8 million made possible through public and private partnership with matches from the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission (Commission), the United Sorghum Checkoff Program, and an enhanced appropriation from the Kansas Legislature itself, these funds will allow CSIP to maintain its critical role in sorghum research and advancement through 2036. Securing funding for CSIP 2.0 resulted from a network of earnest partners working diligently this past year. Together, farmer leadership and staff of the Commission and the Kansas Sorghum Producers Association (KSP) operated in harmony to forge the future of sorghum improvement alongside securing a water-smart crop for Kansas through CSIP.

Starting in the 2024 spring planting season, these two farmer-led organizations secured a partnership with the State of Kansas as a significant match of farmer investment for CSIP 2.0. In May 2024, KSP engaged with the Governor as key stakeholders for a new 10-Year State Water Plan, which synchronized with a potential second decade of CSIP if the will and the way to do so presented itself. The will and the way presented itself, as readers will recall, Kansas Sorghum's CEO Adam York writing in the Fall 2024 Sorghum Grower Magazine that, with the success of CSIP's first decade, the answer to the question of "Why stop here?" became "We keep going."

Throughout 2024, KSP attended virtually each of the 14 "Water Local Consults" conducted across Kansas, presenting information about how crop options and sorghum advancements align with the state's economic and resource conservation goals. During this same period, the effort secured matched investments and pledges from private partners, which became contingent upon an increased leveraged investment from the State of Kansas.

KSP farmers' vision was forged with a shared vision from the Kansas Department of Agriculture as they requested a $1 million sorghum investment match in the agency's FY2026 budget, which, if approved, would unlock an additional $4 million from the private sector. Governor Laura Kelly agreed with the agency and included the sorghum investment in her FY2026 budget, which was then sent to the Legislature as part of the State Water Plan.

KSP mobilized the legislative process, including hosting a "Day at the Statehouse" in late January to garner Legislative support for the Governor's recommendation in the Legislature's FY2026 budget bill. Over the subsequent weeks, the sorghum investment successfully moved through various committees in both the House and Senate, receiving approvals from the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Budget Committee on January 31, House Appropriations Committee on February 4, and the full House of Representatives on February 19. The Senate followed suit with approvals from the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee in early March and the Senate Ways and Means Committee on March 13. Finally, on March 28, 2025, both the House and Senate approved the conference FY2026 budget package, which included the sorghum investment match, awaiting a return to the Governor for signature.

But what does CSIP mean for growers in Kansas and beyond? Since inception, CSIP has a proven track record as a platform leveraging nearly $10 million in sorghum research funds. CSIP drives innovation through key initiatives that include discovering elite seed material to increase yield in water-stressed environments, developing high-value seed traits like unique proteins or starches, and resistance to pests such as the sugarcane aphid. As evidence of CSIP's impact, genetic marker traits enabled by the platform are also now used in the development of over 50% of U.S. sorghum industry hybrids. CSIP builds strategic partnerships throughout the sorghum value chain, from seed development to end-users. Recent future-focused initiatives hones in on sorghum forages for the U.S. beef and dairy sectors, which perfectly illustrates this collaborative approach.

"The multi-million dollar investment in CSIP 2.0 is more than just a win for research; it's a direct investment in the livelihoods of sorghum producers at the farm gate," said Brant Peterson, Commission chairman of Stanton County. "The hard work by Kansas Sorghum staff and producer leaders to secure this funding will translate directly to our bottom lines as growers well into the future."

The successful procurement of funding for CSIP 2.0 isn't also just a win on paper for Kansas; it's a game-changer for every sorghum producer in the Sorghum Belt. This multi-million dollar investment provides the foundation for sorghum innovation over the next decade, translating directly into more resilient and profitable U.S. crop production for years to come. It's a clear signal that CSIP will double down on its role as the industry's standard and a catalyst for sorghum research, development, and producer success for the next decade and decades to come.

SORGHUM CHECKOFF

NEWSLETTER

sorghumcheckoff.com | Summer Edition 2025

Sorghum Checkoff Research Powers Breakthrough in Alternative Proteins and 3D-Printed Foods

A Sorghum Checkoff-funded research project is opening new doors for sorghum as a key ingredient in the alternative protein and food innovation space. The multi-year study, conducted by Dr. Ali Ubeyitogullari and his team at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, focused on enhancing sorghum protein's functionality for advanced food technologies, including 3D food printing.

While sorghum has long been valued for its drought resilience and gluten-free nutrition, its use in food applications has remained limited due to challenges with digestibility, solubility and flavor. This research aimed to overcome those barriers by exploring new processing methods and technologies that elevate the crop's value in emerging food markets.

Researchers developed a novel supercritical carbon dioxide (SC-CO^2) drying method that significantly improved the functional properties of sorghum proteins. Compared to traditional freeze-drying, SC-CO^2 produced protein powders with a porous structure, reduced off-flavors and higher solubility across a range of pH levels. Most notably, digestibility improved by nearly 40 percent, a critical step for food industry adoption.

With these optimized protein concentrates, the team turned to 3D food printing, a technology that creates customized food products layer by layer using edible gels or "bioinks." Sorghum protein gels demonstrated strong printability, especially at 25 percent concentration using specific nozzle configurations. The resulting prints held their shape well and matched design models closely, proving sorghum's potential in high-tech food design.

To further enhance the nutritional profile, researchers developed dual-protein structures by combining sorghum with soy and pea proteins. These blends addressed lysine limitations in sorghum and created more balanced amino acid profiles, opening the door to complete plant-based meals.

"This work expands the possibilities for sorghum in food innovation," said Norma Ritz Johnson, executive director of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. "By investing in cutting-edge research, we're helping drive demand for sorghum in markets that value sustainability, nutrition and innovation."

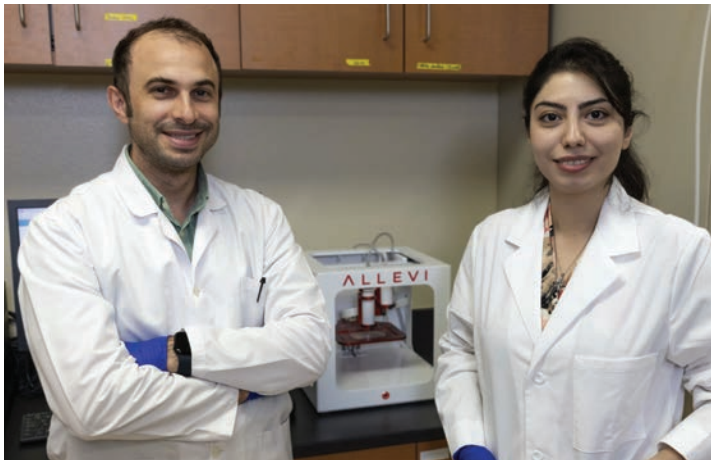
WHAT'S INSIDE

SORGHUM THE SMART CHOICE

In addition to several published peer-reviewed articles, the project generated national and international interest at conferences like the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) and the American Oil Chemists' Society (AOCS). It also secured follow-up funding from USDA for related projects, including micronutrient delivery and sorghum protein-based biomedical applications.

The Sorghum Checkoff's investment in this research reflects its broader mission to support high-impact innovation that adds value for sorghum producers. As global interest grows in alternative proteins and sustainable ingredients, sorghum's unique attributes make it a natural fit for future-focused food systems.

To learn more about how Sorghum Checkoff research is unlocking new uses for U.S. sorghum, visit *sorghumcheckoff.com.*



Paden Johnson/ U of A System Division of Agriculture Ali Ubeyitogullari, left, an assistant professor of food engineering with the Food Science and Biological and Agricultural Engineering departments, and Sorour Barekat, a postdoctoral fellow in the Food Science Department, developed a new 3D "bioink" from sorghum proteins.

Sorghum Checkoff Announces First-Ever Human Clinical Trial on Whole Grain Sorghum's Health Benefits

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) recently announced the launch of the first human clinical trial to evaluate whole grain sorghum's health benefits. Conducted by the University of Nebraska–Lincoln and co-funded by USCP in partnership with USDA's Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) Commodity Board program, this landmark study will investigate how daily consumption of two whole-grain sorghum varieties — a traditional white sorghum and a phenolic-rich "sumac" sorghum — influences key health markers such as insulin resistance, inflammation and gut microbiome composition.

The trial is designed as a randomized crossover study in adults with obesity. Throughout the study, researchers will measure changes in insulin resistance, as well as secondary outcomes like body weight and composition, blood pressure, blood lipids, antioxidant and inflammatory biomarkers, and gut microbiota profiles.

"This first-of-its-kind human study is a direct result of sorghum producers' commitment to scientific research," said Lanier Dabruzzi, MS, RD, LD, Director of Nutrition & Food Innovation of the Sorghum Checkoff. "For years, we've seen promising evidence of sorghum's health benefits in vitro and in animal studies, and now we are taking the critical next step of exploring these and other benefits within the complexity of the human body. By investing in rigorous clinical research, we aim to provide the science-backed evidence health professionals and food companies need to recognize sorghum as a truly beneficial grain for whole-body health."

Tim Lust, CEO of the Sorghum Checkoff, noted that the study's implications extend from the field to the consumer marketplace. "Sorghum farmers have always known this crop is special, and now we're proving it on the biggest stage – human nutrition," Lust said. "This groundbreaking trial is not just a research milestone; it's laying the groundwork for sorghum's future. The data will be crucial as we pursue qualified health claims for sorghum with the FDA and collaborate with food companies on new sorghum-based products that deliver on nutrition and sustainability. It's an investment that we believe will pay dividends in the form of greater demand and value for our growers."

Looking ahead, the findings from this study are expected to pave the way for subsequent research to further explore sorghum's role in human health and to serve as a roadmap for food companies to innovate for sorghum-based products.

For more information about the USCP and other research projects please visit *SorghumCheckoff.com.*

Forage Sorghum Momentum: What Producers Should Know

Forage sorghum, especially in the form of silage, is gaining serious ground among producers in drought-prone areas looking for a water-efficient alternative to corn. The United Sorghum Checkoff Program is actively educating farmers, supporting research and capturing assessments on sorghum silage acres to better serve the growing demand.

Forage sorghum brings several key advantages to the table:

Versatility: Hybrids are available to meet both forage and starch needs.

Water efficiency: Sorghum uses 36% less water than other grains.

Yield stability: It performs well even under dry, tough conditions.

Disease resistance: Sorghum is naturally resistant to tar spot and corn stunt disease.

Cost advantage: Sorghum seed typically costs less per acre than corn.

Recent innovations in kernel processing have improved starch digestibility to as much as 65 to 70 percent. New male-sterile hybrids eliminate the need for kernel processing altogether by storing energy as water-soluble carbohydrates. Research from Texas A&M shows that replacing a percentage of corn silage with sorghum silage can increase energy-corrected milk yield in dairy operations.

Since 2022, the Sorghum Checkoff has supported extensive research through partnerships with institutions like Texas A&M, Cornell, Purdue, Iowa State and the University of Florida. Projects have focused on nitrogen optimization, seeding rates, protein enhancement and performance trials in both dairy and beef cattle systems.

To keep the momentum going, the checkoff is investing in outreach to inform dairies and livestock producers of sorghum's value. Educational efforts include field days, extension materials and producer resources focused on building rations, hybrid selection, agronomy and feed performance.

As producers seek cost-effective, resilient feed solutions, forage sorghum stands out as a smart choice. The Sorghum Checkoff remains committed to supporting the adoption of forage sorghum through education, research and market development.

For tools, updates and forage resources, visit *sorghumcheckoff.com*.

New Recipes Highlight Sorghum's Versatility and Global Appeal

The Sorghum Checkoff continues to elevate sorghum's profile as a premium ingredient by investing in new recipes and photograpghy that showcase its versatility, nutrition and conservation benefits. These recipes, designed for both consumers and foodservice professionals, will be featured across social media and paid campaigns to build demand and shared value for sorghum growers.

In addition, a new recipe series, World of Sorghum, taps into trending global flavors while celebrating sorghum's heritage as an ancient grain. Developed by Chase Obenchain, Sorghum Checkoff Corporate Chef, these internationally inspired recipes reflect sorghum's culinary relevance across cultures and its role in modern, sustainable cooking. Keep an eye out for these exciting new tools to help share sorghum's story. Explore the recipes and share the story of sorghum at *sorghumcheckoff.com.*

Strawberry Crumble Bars

Summer Peach, Tomato and Sorghum Salad

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

September 21-23	**Export Sorghum**	*San Antonio, Texas*
October 14-16	**Sunbelt Ag Expo**	*Moultrie, Georgia*
October 19-22	**Global Ethanol Summit**	*Washington, DC*

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.

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Sorghum Shortcuts

National Sorghum Foundation Names 2025 Scholarship Class

Three exceptional students have been selected to receive scholarships from the National Sorghum Foundation for the 2025–26 academic year in recognition of their academic achievements and dedication to the future of agriculture.

"As part of the foundation's mission, we are committed to supporting students with a passion for agriculture, especially those who show promise in advancing sorghum research, production, or advocacy," said National Sorghum Foundation Chairman Jeff Dahlberg, Ph.D. "We are honored to recognize these students and look forward to the positive impact they will have on the future of agriculture."

Each scholarship includes a $1,500 award to help cover education-related expenses. In addition, the Bill Kubecka Memorial Scholarship includes the opportunity for Le to join the National Sorghum Producers in Washington, D.C., gaining firsthand insight into agricultural policy and federal decision-making.

For more information about the National Sorghum Foundation and scholarship opportunities, visit SorghumGrowers.com/foundation-scholarships.

Andrew Le, a senior at Kansas State University, is the recipient of this year's Bill Kubecka Memorial Scholarship. He is majoring in political science and global food systems leadership and served as the Kansas Sorghum Collegiate Fellow through K-State's Food and Ag Policy Fellowship program for spring 2025. Originally from Wichita,Kansas, Le plans to pursue a public service fellowship after graduation, with a long-term goal of working in food access and public management. He hopes to serve in a government role that improves lives through effective policy and community-focused programs.

Olivia Marti, a junior at Iowa State University, received the Darrell Rosenow Memorial Scholarship. From Waukon, Iowa, Marti is studying agronomy and agricultural business and plans to pursue an advanced degree in either crop development or agricultural business after graduation. Her goal is to bridge the gap between research and real-world application, bringing innovations in plant breeding and seed systems to farmers and markets. Marti hopes to work in the seed industry or agricultural research and development, supporting the development of resilient, high-performing crop varieties that meet the demands of a changing global food system.

Charles Colvin, the recipient of the prestigious Bruce Maunder Memorial Scholarship, is a senior at Penn State University studying plant science with a minor in agronomy. Originally from Malvern,Pennsylvania, Colvin plans to pursue a doctorate in plant sciences with a focus on genetics, physiology and biotechnology. His goal is to contribute to sustainable agriculture through modern breeding techniques and innovative biotechnology. Colvin envisions a future career in either academia or industry, where he can develop solutions that increase crop resilience, improve food security and reduce environmental impact.

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