Sorghum is on the rise. There’s no doubt about that. An increase in productivity and interest in creative markets both domestically and internationally have boosted demand for the crop. While demand is steadfast, supply is no longer meeting the growing various market needs of sorghum.

One way to meet demand and achieve producer profitability is by placing a key emphasis on enhancing sorghum genetics. The Sorghum Checkoff is leveraging valuable research through collaborative and strategic investments with public and private entities across the U.S. to unlock the genetic potential of sorghum to ultimately bring new and improved traits to growers’ fields.

In 2013 alone, the Sorghum Checkoff invested $3.9 million toward crop improvement.

“Devoting efforts to broad areas of seed innovation such as harvestable yield, drought tolerance, and breeding technologies are key in the advancement of grain sorghum genetics,” said Justin Weinheimer, crop improvement program director for the Sorghum Checkoff.

Although advancing sorghum genetics is no easy task, breeders are now utilizing techniques such as DNA sequencing, marker-assisted breeding and gene identification to help with efficiency and success.

Unlike years past, advancements and technologies developed in other commodities are now being made available to sorghum. Weinheimer said herbicide tolerance has eluded sorghum farmers for many years but that could soon change.

“DuPont Pioneer is currently working toward finalizing the development of a chemical product within the ALS class of herbicides to provide growers with post-emergence grass control,” Weinheimer said. “The chemical, which currently does not have approval, Zest, will be used in conjunction with Inzen sorghum genetics, originally developed by Kansas State University.”

Hybrids with ALS tolerance are expected to be available to growers as early as 2016 with limited possibilities in 2015. Weinheimer said this naturally occurring, non-transgenic herbicide tolerance will bring a new age of farm-level management to growers.

Diversity in sorghum genetics adds tremendous value for sorghum breeders. The USDA Agricultural Research Service center in Lubbock, Texas, with support from the Sorghum Checkoff has explored this diversity and has discovered some unique genetics in some sorghums, including a genetic line known as multiseed. Weinheimer said multiseed offers an unprecedented opportunity for sorghum yield.

Continued on USCP Newsletter p.4
Iowa Farmer Setting a Trend with Sorghum

Sorghum is not a typical crop you will find in a field in Centerville, Iowa. In fact, Joel Spring said his friends and neighbors thought he was crazy when he started growing this new crop. But after a couple years of successfully growing and marketing grain sorghum, Spring’s neighbors are now showing an interest in his off-the-wall crop.

“They want to know the right management practices so when they raise it the first year everything will be done right,” Spring said.

In southern Iowa, sorghum is becoming more popular because of its drought tolerance. Spring began growing sorghum two years ago and said it withstands harsh weather much better than other crops typically grown in the area.

“Sorghum can take the heat and drought stress, hang in there a while longer and still maintain yield,” he said.

In addition to withstanding drought conditions, the market for sorghum in the area has recently expanded. Spring said grain sorghum is gaining popularity in Southern Iowa, especially with the help of Murphy Brown LLC and the Sorghum Checkoff along with an increase in local educational field days.

“Murphy Brown said they could take enough sorghum to cover 50,000 acres in southern Iowa and northern Missouri,” Spring said. “I think it’s a crop that will really take off here in the next five-10 years”

Spring said he sees a promising future for sorghum in Iowa from an economic standpoint. He is making $80-100 more per acre growing sorghum than other crops he has previously grown.

To accompany his sorghum, Spring raises 1,600 hogs annually in his swine operation. He is solely using a sorghum feed ration and finds it beneficial in many ways.

“We did nutritional samples and we weren’t losing anything on feed value or feed efficiency by switching to sorghum. With the economics being behind it, it just makes sense on our farm to be feeding our hogs grain sorghum,” Spring said.

Considering Spring is fairly new to the sorghum industry, he said his unique opportunity to be a member of Leadership Sorghum Class II helped him learn new ways to improve his operation and find best management practices for his region.

“We use different production practices,” he said, “What works in [my classmates’ areas] may be things to try here, just because sorghum is such a new crop for us.”

Spring said he is anxious to learn more about sorghum and what the crop has to offer in the upcoming Leadership Sorghum session in November.

“The biggest things I will try to bring back from my participation in the Leadership Sorghum program is the knowledge and expertise to expand this crop in our area and what it takes to make sorghum a popular and viable crop,” Spring said. “You’ll be very impressed with what sorghum will do on your farm if you’ll treat it like you do any crop.”
U.S. sorghum export demand has skyrocketed within the last year. While demand is growing overall from a global standpoint, China’s newfound interest in U.S. grain sorghum led to a record-breaking year for sorghum exports.

A total of 197.3 million bushels were exported last year, with China representing 90 percent of those bushels. With the assistance of new and traditional markets, like Mexico and Japan, U.S. grain sorghum exports reached an approximate revenue of $1.4 billion.

Extending into the 2014/2015 marketing year beginning Sept. 1, 2014, export demand has remained steadfast. At the end of October, total commitments for the current marketing year have reached 2.8 million metric tons, equating to 111.7 million bushels. Of the current total, China represents 88 percent with 98.7 million bushels, already 55.7 percent of China’s total amount purchased last year.

Florentino Lopez, Sorghum Checkoff executive director, said the export market has improved basis and added value for sorghum growers

“The future of the sorghum export market is unknown,” Lopez said. “However, after speaking with several grain buyers from China, Japan and others, the future appears to be promising. The main question now is whether supply will be able to keep up with the growing demand both internationally and domestically.”
Secretary Vilsack Announces Sorghum Board Appointments

The Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack announced Oct. 3, 2014 the appointments of five members to serve on the United Sorghum Checkoff Program board of directors. Members will serve three-year terms.

The growers appointed to the board include:
- Adam Baldwin of Moundridge, Kan.
- Dale Murden of Monte Alto, Texas
- Carlton Bridgeforth of Tanner, Ala., at-large
- Verity C. Ulibarri of McAlister, N.M., at-large

The board is structured so that the state with the largest production is allocated five positions. The state with the second largest production is allocated three positions and the third largest production state is allocated one. There are four at-large postions for which at least two representatives must be appointed from states other than the three top sorghum producing states.

The 13-member board is authorized by the Commodity Promotion, Research, and Information Act of 1996. The U.S. Secretary of Agriculture selected the appointees from sorghum producers nominated by certified producer organizations.

For more information regarding the board and their responsibilities, visit www.SorghumCheckoff.com.

Sorghum Genetic Pipeline, Continued

“There is a high correlation between grain yield and the number of seeds on a sorghum head,” Weinheimer said. “Multiseed can generate up to three times as many seeds in a sorghum head.”

While the full impact of multiseed is currently unknown, Weinheimer said it certainly offers plant breeders an opportunity to integrate a new platform of genetics with the potential for increasing yield that will be visibly seen in the field.

Advancing sorghum genetics is a numbers game and can take upwards of seven to 10 years to land in the hands of growers. The Sorghum Checkoff recently partnered with DuPont Pioneer to develop a plant breeding tool known as double haploid. This technology is common in other predominant crops and essentially allows plant breeders to shave years off of their breeding programs.

“If successful, this technology would allow sorghum breeders to incorporate ideal genetics into sorghum by as much as three years faster,” Weinheimer said. “Within the fast-paced plant genetics community, this would allow sorghum to bring better hybrids to market faster.”

The horizon for sorghum genetics is bright. With accelerated emphasis on the advancement of seed genetics, the pipeline of available tools continues to grow and puts the sorghum seed industry on track to deliver innovative products to growers. With a bag fully stocked of premiere seed technology, this could be the dawn of a new era for sorghum growers.

Sorghum Industry Events

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<td>Kansas Agribusiness Expo</td>
<td>Wichita, Kan.</td>
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<td>Thanksgiving Holiday (Office Closed)</td>
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<td>Dec. 6-8</td>
<td>Texas Farm Bureau Meeting</td>
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For more events, visit sorghumcheckoff.com/calendar

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