



# NEWSLETTER

sorghumcheckoff.com | Spring 2021

## Sorghum Checkoff Joins Sustainability Alliances

### U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in Action

The Sorghum Checkoff recently joined the sustainability alliance U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in Action (USFRA) to continue positioning sorghum as a key player in the sustainability space. USFRA actively works to achieve its mission of “connecting farmers and ranchers to food and agriculture stakeholders to co-create sustainable food systems” by providing leadership to drive outcomes, tapping into farmer communities to identify solutions, facilitating collaboration across food systems, employing science to develop promising solutions and enhancing connections between farms and households.

USFRA has a strong consumer-focused voice targeted at effectively communicating the role farmers and ranchers play in the sustainable food systems of the future. Numerous other grower associations, agribusinesses and major consumer brands also sit at the USFRA table of supporters and partners. This membership will emphasize sorghum’s role within the industry and offer opportunities for increased engagement with other players in the consumer and food space. It will also highlight the

role sorghum plays globally in contributing to the sustainability of U.S. agriculture.

“We know that our growers have a strong sustainability story to tell,” said Sorghum Checkoff Executive Director Norma Ritz Johnson. “Generations of sorghum farmers live and depend on the land, and their future is tied to the health of the soils and ecosystems that support them. This makes farmers important stewards of our natural resources, and we believe they are positioned to help lead the charge responding to pressing climate and food security challenges. Amplifying grower voices is key to ensuring that farmers are actively engaged in crafting the solutions that we need, and we commend USFRA’s efforts to help secure U.S. farmers’ seats at the table.”

USFRA’s drive for elevating farmer voices spurred the initiative Farm Table, an organized group of farmer ambassadors to serve as the voice of U.S. agriculture through various communications opportunities and avenues. The Checkoff will have a sorghum grower representing the industry as a part of the Farm Table who will be able to effectively highlight sorghum’s unique sustainability story.

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## America's Conservation Ag Movement

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program recently joined America's Conservation Ag Movement (ACAM) as its first Sustaining Level Partner. ACAM is part of Trust In Food, a purpose-driven division of Farm Journal dedicated to mainstreaming and accelerating the transition to more sustainable and regenerative agriculture practices, making every dollar invested in conservation agriculture more impactful.

ACAM brings farmers and the sustainability community together around the future of farming by bringing profitable, planet-friendly farming practices into the mainstream. The public-private partnership connects the dots, giving farmers a platform to share their journey, meet other farmers on the same path and access the resources they need to under-

take change. The Movement is organized by Trust In Food in partnership with the Farm Journal Foundation. Financial and technical support is provided by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service and leading agribusinesses, food companies and nonprofit organizations.

In support of the Sorghum Checkoff, the Movement will work to:

- Communicate the sustainability story of sorghum producers across the industry and to buyers
- Secure farmers' continued license to operate and access global markets
- Ensure continued innovation that builds on the desired characteristics and uses of sorghum, as an ingredient in consumer food products, pet food, animal feed and many other markets
- Monitor and evaluate relevant sustainability activities to

deliver stories and data points that illustrate the sustainability accomplishments and progress of sorghum farmers

"The Sorghum Checkoff is honored to partner on America's Conservation Ag Movement," said Sorghum Checkoff CEO Tim Lust. "As U.S. sorghum producers successfully grow more than 400 million bushels of this crop annually for diverse uses and buyers around the world, they are doing so in a way that is attuned to excellent stewardship of soil, water and wildlife habitat. We're pleased to honor their contributions to healthy working lands and ecosystems through the Movement while also enabling sorghum producers to take the next steps on their own conservation ag journeys."

More information about Trust in Food and ACAM can be found at [trustinfood.com](http://trustinfood.com).

## Norma Ritz Johnson Named Sorghum Checkoff Executive Director

**A**fter an extensive nationwide search, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program has selected Norma Ritz Johnson as the organization's third executive director. She began her role on Jan. 12, 2021.

"Johnson brings strong organizational management with a background in agriculture and sorghum," Sorghum Checkoff CEO Tim Lust said. "I am excited to have Norma back on Team Sorghum. She has proven over the last 15 years her leadership abilities to take on major projects and

shepherd them through government and private industry processes to success."

"The Sorghum Checkoff board of directors and I look forward to working with Johnson and are extremely confident in her leadership ability to move this organization forward," said Sorghum Checkoff Chairman Kent Martin, a sorghum farmer from Alva, Oklahoma. "We believe her vast experience and past sorghum industry relationships will be beneficial in furthering the program priorities of the Checkoff



to increase the value of sorghum and improve profitability for our growers.”

Johnson most recently served as Executive Vice President for the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, a 5-Star accredited organization that represents almost 1,700 businesses and over 79,000 employees on the South Plains of Texas where she led strategic initiatives and staff communications with an emphasis on transportation, agriculture and health care. As a leader, her teams implemented programs that were awarded the national Chamber of the Year twice in the last 11 years. Norma also served as Communications Director for National Sorghum Producers in the early

2000s. Her expertise in strategic planning and leadership make her a valuable asset to the checkoff program.

“This is an amazing opportunity, and I very much look forward to stepping into this position at the Sorghum Checkoff to help build on its great foundation of success,” Johnson said. “My entire career has led me to this role returning to the sorghum industry, and I’m eager to roll my sleeves up and get to work helping to bring value to the organization and sorghum producers as we accelerate this important industry’s growth nationally and globally.”

Johnson replaces Florentino Lopez who has served as the organization’s executive director

since 2011. Lopez will continue to serve the sorghum industry in a new capacity consulting on international market development.

“I would like to thank Florentino Lopez for his strong leadership and service to the Sorghum Checkoff and sorghum farmers,” CEO Lust said. “Lopez has been a tremendous asset to our organization and our industry, and I have no doubt that Johnson will continue to lead our industry with the same level of vision and integrity.”

## Powerful Pairings Punch Up the Plate and the Palette

**T**he Sorghum Checkoff recently joined a campaign called Powerful Pairings with USA Pulses and the National Pork Board to highlight the National Family Meals Movement. The National Family Meals Movement was launched by the Food Industry Association to encourage consumers to join the movement by pledging to share one more family breakfast, lunch or dinner at home per week. With rapidly changing shopping, cooking and eating behaviors shifting consumer preferences, key commodity groups are realizing that by working together, they have a greater chance of impacting consumer perceptions, nutrition and their producers’ bottom lines.

Powerful Pairings, a collaborative marketing initiative

that promotes the pairing of whole foods to bring taste, balance and nutrition to family meals, was launched in the fall of last year. As a testament to its success, the collaboration is expanding this year to include the United Sorghum Checkoff Program.

Through the innovative campaign, the organizations connected with retailers, registered dietitians, nutritionists and consumers to encourage them to try unexpected and ingenious food pairings to power up their plate with delicious and nutritious family meals. Free recipes and resources were created, including infographics, fact sheets and nutritional information.

“Powerful Pairings makes it easy to add taste, nutrition, texture and variety to every meal,” said Becky Garrison, RDN, LD,

director of domestic marketing, USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council, American Pulse Association. “With the launch of the new 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, our campaign can help families better understand how they can make every bite count.”

In January, the FMI Foundation awarded Powerful Pairings its distinguished 2020 Gold Plate Award in the Community Collaborators category. The Gold Plate Awards shine a spotlight on programs created by suppliers, food retailers and community collaborators that encourage families to share more meals together at home.

“We are excited about the expanded partnership and the opportunity to promote how pork, pulses and sorghum can easily be part of great tasting,



*Lemon-Garlic Tenderloin with Warm Sorghum Salad*

nutritious parts of family meals,” said Sorghum Checkoff Market Development Director Doug Bice. “This partnership will help lead to a greater end-user demand for sorghum by high-

lighting how well it can fit in everyday diets.”  
 Learn more about the pork, pulses and sorghum Powerful Pairings initiative at *powerful-pairings.com*.

**powerful + pairings**  
 delicious + nutritious + ingenious

**SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS**

**May 31** Memorial Day  
*Office Closed*

**July 27-29** Leadership Sorghum Program I  
*Kansas*

**August 4-5** Sorghum Checkoff Annual Board Meeting  
*Oklahoma City, OK*

For more events, visit [sorghumcheckoff.com/calendar](http://sorghumcheckoff.com/calendar)



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**USCP MISSION**

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

