



NEWSLETTER

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Sorghum Checkoff Board and Staff – What Do We Do?

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

This last summer, I started my ninth year as the Director of Agronomy for the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. Prior to joining the Checkoff, I had what I thought was a good understanding of what they did, and in reality, I had no idea of the depth of what the Checkoff does for sorghum growers.

The Sorghum Checkoff is a producer-funded organization dedicated to improving the sustainability of the sorghum industry through research, promotion and education. Checkoff funds come directly from producers by an assessment of 0.6% of the net value of grain sorghum and 0.35% of the net market value of sorghum forage. The assessment is collected by the first purchasers. For example, if grain is sold to the local elevator at \$5 a bushel, then the Checkoff is paid 6 cents per bushel. A significant portion of these funds is then passed back to the sorghum state organizations to fund their programs.

The Checkoff is directed by a 13-member Board of Directors composed of sorghum growers, ensuring funds are used efficiently and meet grower objectives. They do not get paid for their service and, given a chance, I hope you will thank them for unselfishly giving of their time

and expertise. A testament to the fantastic work that they do is from the last referendum on the Checkoff, in which sorghum growers overwhelmingly supported its continuation by a 96.5 percent approval vote!

This year marks 15 years of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. Over the past decade-and-a-half, the Checkoff has made significant strides on behalf of producers. Successes include funneling resources into cutting-edge research to advance production techniques.

One of the key agronomic contributions was the rapid reaction to the sugarcane aphid, now known as the sorghum aphid, which had the potential to devastate the sorghum industry. The Checkoff quickly mobilized seed and crop protection companies, along with university and ARS scientists, to work together to develop aphid tolerant hybrids, label effective insecticides and establish best management practices to control the pest. Information to combat the aphid was quickly passed to growers through the many channels developed by the Checkoff communications team.

A recent milestone that the board worked tirelessly on was the advancement of over-the-

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top grass control in sorghum. As of 2023, we now have three technologies—Double Team™, Inzen and igrowth—that are very effective in postemergence grass control in sorghum.

There are many current projects now being funded by the Checkoff that have the potential to significantly impact and increase sorghum grower profitability. One project is the development of sorghum germplasm with tolerance to iron deficiency. A second is a fundamental examination of the

traits needed in sorghum to enhance yield under both limited water and more optimum growing conditions. These are what I call 'big swing projects' that are not easy to accomplish and will take time, but have the potential to move the needle forward for the industry as a whole.

For more information on what the Sorghum Checkoff is all about, visit our website at sorghumcheckoff.com.

Sorghum Checkoff Elects Kendall Hodgson as New Chairman and Swears in New Board Members

During the United Sorghum Checkoff Program's (USCP) annual December meeting, four new Board directors, appointed by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, were sworn in. Two other producers assumed their second terms having been reappointed to their roles by Secretary Vilsack. The Board also elected Kendall Hodgson of Little River, Kansas as the 2024 Chairman.

"I am honored to lead this organization into a new era of growth and innovation," newly elected USCP Chairman Kendall Hodgson said. "Sorghum is a crop with incredible potential, and I am excited to work alongside our leaders and producers to further elevate its impact. Together, we will cultivate opportunities, foster sustainable growth and strengthen the sorghum industry."

The newly elected USCP Executive Committee and newly appointed Board Directors include:

- Chairman - Kendall Hodgson, Little River, Kansas
- Vice Chairman - Ethan Miller, Columbia, Missouri
- Treasurer - Kim Baldwin, Inman, Kansas
- Secretary - Zack Rendel, Miami, Oklahoma
- At-Large Member - James Jay Haase, Eads, Colorado
- At-Large Member - Ethan J. Miller, Columbia, Missouri
- At-Large Member - Tracy Zink, Indianola, Nebraska
- Kansas Member - David K. Schemm, Sharon Springs, Kansas
- Texas Member - Brian Adamek, Victoria, Texas
- Texas Member - Scott Irlbeck, Lubbock, Texas, (2-Year Term)

"Amidst the challenges of the persisting drought, innovation thrives in the heart of challenges," USCP Executive Director Norma Ritz Johnson said. "We are ecstatic that this group of producers and board members embody the resilience that will steer the sorghum industry towards a horizon of groundbreaking possibilities."

Five of the newly appointed or reappointed directors to the Board will serve three-year terms and one member will serve a two-year term. The terms of the members appointed to three-year terms start December 2023 and end December 2026. The term of the member appointed to a two-year term starts immediately and ends in December 2025.

The 13-member USCP board is composed of nine sorghum farmers who represent the three states with the largest sorghum production – Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas – and four at-large national representatives. More information about the board is available on the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) United Sorghum Checkoff Program webpage and the board's website, sorghumcheckoff.com.



Pictured from left to right is and Kahl Sesker - USDA Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Tracy Zink - newly appointed director, Scott Irlbeck - newly appointed director, David K. Schemm - newly appointed director and Norma Ritz Johnson - Executive Director

Cultivating Growth: U.S. Sorghum's Trade Mission to China

By Sorghum Checkoff Board Director Kim Baldwin

In April 2023, I was privileged to represent U.S. sorghum producers as a member of the first U.S. Grains Council Trade Mission Team to return to China since 2019. Four individuals representing different parts of the sorghum industry throughout the Sorghum Belt, as well as three U.S. Grains Council staffers, traveled throughout South China including stops in Shanghai, Xiamen, Shenzhen and Guangzhou during this trade mission. Chinese buyers have kept their interest in U.S. coarse grains and co-products. Moreover, these buyers have worked to maintain partnerships with U.S. suppliers for future business.

China ended its "zero-covid policy" in December 2022, and the market has gradually returned to business as usual.

Our team began in Shanghai where we met with a researcher from Jiangnan University who is currently studying the properties of U.S. sorghum for Chinese liquor production.

This liquor, known as baijiu, is a colorless, traditional spirit that is widely consumed in China. By some estimates, baijiu accounts for nearly 70% of the total alcoholic beverages available in China. While traveling through South China on this trade mission, the marketing of various baijiu brands dominated billboards, display cases and any surface one might or might not expect to find an advertisement—including pillars at airports and display screens at luggage carousels.

Baijiu is produced using a unique fermentation process. While other grains including wheat, corn, rice and sticky rice can be used as raw materials in the making of baijiu, sorghum accounts for roughly 50% of the grain used in the production of this distilled spirit.

Researchers at Jiangnan University have been testing U.S. sorghum samples to identify the preferred varieties of sorghum from different sorghum-producing areas within the United States for baijiu production. While the research is based on a number of factors that identify the preferred varieties and location from which the varieties originate, one key area of focus is identifying how the type of sorghum and its origin that impacts baijiu's aroma profiles and flavor compounds. The study will see its final three fermentation batches

at the end of February 2024, and the final report is expected by mid-2024.

Baijiu is a spirit that is consumed primarily in social settings, and since China's "zero-covid policy" ended in December 2022, one expects to see increased consumption due to increased social gatherings. This is a market for U.S. sorghum producers to keep aware of.

South China is an impressive trading hub that is important for U.S. agriculture. Nearly 40% of the world's leather footwear is produced within this region. More than 60% of the world's denim production is also located in South China. Moreover, South China leads its country in swine, broiler (chicken and duck), and aqua feed production. Most impressive is that of all U.S. sorghum exported to China annually, approximately 74% of that sorghum enters through South China.

While traveling throughout South China, our trade mission team met with nine companies during one-on-one visits. During these visits, we highlighted findings from the *2022/2023 U.S. Grains Council Sorghum Quality Report* which provides unbiased information about the quality of the U.S. sorghum crop. The report identified the results from 97 samples taken from outbound shipments from 15 country elevators and one large sorghum producer. The samples were analyzed for grade factors established by the USDA, chemical compositions, and other quality characteristics not reported elsewhere.

The report ultimately showed U.S. sorghum was, on average, graded above the necessary requirements for U.S. No. 1 certification. It also showed an absence of tannins and a protein content that averaged 11%. Moreover, the report showed that broken kernel and foreign material were lower than last year's study results, suggesting the ability of U.S. sorghum to withstand handling and storage threats.

As our team discussed these results with many of the buyers, it was clear that the quality report was not a surprise to many of them. Multiple times during our conversations, buyers would note that U.S. sorghum is preferred over competing countries because the U.S. sorghum "quality is stable."

The groups we visited consisted of suppliers/distributors for China's animal feed manufactur-



ers, animal feeders, and suppliers for liquor industries, as well as those directly involved in animal feed (livestock and pet food) production and aquatic products.

It was clear that the U.S. is not the only source considered when it comes to sourcing grain sorghum for Chinese consumption. That said, it was also clear that we have strong relationships established that have been nurtured for well over a decade with Chinese buyers and have been beneficial to the U.S. sorghum industry.

Dedicated, long-term efforts to maintain lines of communication with Chinese buyers were evidenced while on this mission. The work individuals within the United Sorghum Checkoff Program and the U.S. Grains Council have done to keep open lines of communication over the years was clear. Following the pandemic, it was clear that those

relationships remain as the buyers we visited were happy to see us, happy to host us, and happy to engage in discussions centered around U.S. sorghum that would benefit everyone.

While U.S. sorghum has generally been utilized by Chinese buyers to fulfill the feed production needs of swine, broilers and layers, there is a number of other areas seeing tremendous growth that highlight the importance of shipping U.S. sorghum to South China.

For example, as Chinese consumer demands on protein evolve to include beef, opportunities to increase U.S. sorghum in ruminant feed rations are a possibility. Opportunities within China's aquaculture and pet food sectors also show great promise given feed production trends and impressive year-over-year growth models.

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

Jan 30-1 International Production & Processing Expo
Atlanta, GA

Jan 30-1 Leadership Sorghum Class VI Session 5
Washington, DC

Feb 28-2 2024 Commodity Classic
Houston, TX

For more events, visit sorghumcheckoff.com/calendar

USCP MISSION

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



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