

Sorghum Can Fill a Need for Growers in 2025

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

Persistent drought, high temperatures, soaring input costs and poor commodity prices have created challenges for all crops. With this outlook, grain sorghum emerges as an attractive option for the 2025 planting season, offering advantages such as lower input costs, crop rotation benefits and resilience to drought.

Economic benefits: Low seed costs and input efficiency

One of the primary reasons to consider grain sorghum is its cost-effectiveness. Sorghum seed is significantly less expensive compared to other crops with costs ranging from \$6-\$19 per acre, depending on seeding rate and desired seed treatments.

Sorghum has relatively few insect and disease issues. Hybrids with sorghum aphid tolerance have greatly reduced the need for an insecticide application. When aphids do reach threshold levels, they can be effectively controlled with Sivanto Prime, Transform or Sefina insecticides.

Foliar diseases are seldom a problem in the Great Plains region with its dry climate. In wetter regions, such as the Southeast, anthracnose is the No. 1 disease that infects sor-

ghum. Selecting a hybrid with good anthracnose tolerance can go a long way in avoiding this disease.

Sorghum in crop rotation:

Yield benefits for other crops

Sorghum's advantages extend beyond cost savings; it also provides substantial benefits when used in crop rotations with cotton, soybeans and even corn. Rotating crops can improve soil health, break disease cycles and increase yields.

- 1. Cotton rotation:** Sorghum plays an important role in breaking soil disease cycles, particularly for verticillium wilt, a common issue in cotton. Additionally, sorghum residue after harvest enhances soil moisture retention and helps protect emerging cotton seedlings from wind damage. A 2017 study by Texas A&M University found that cotton yields increased by 26% when rotated with sorghum compared to continuous cotton planting.
- 2. Soybean rotation:** In a multiyear trial conducted near Mead, Nebraska, soybeans planted after

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sorghum experienced a 16.6% yield increase compared to continuous soybean planting. This increase in yield has been attributed to improved soil fertility, better physical properties of the soil, more effective weed control, and reduced diseases, nematodes and insect pests.

- 3. Corn rotation:** One of the more surprising findings for many growers is that corn also benefits from being rotated with sorghum. A five-year Kansas State University trial demonstrated that corn yields increased by 8.4% when following sorghum compared to continuous corn. These yield increases reflect the long-term benefits of improved soil health and nutrient cycling that sorghum introduces into a cropping system.

Herbicide innovations and grass control

Grass control has traditionally been a challenge for growers considering sorghum. However, new herbicide technologies have significantly improved management options.

Non-GMO herbicide technologies like Double Team (S&W Seeds), igrowth (Advanta Seeds) and

Inzen (Corteva) have made it possible for farmers to effectively control grass, including volunteer corn, in their sorghum fields. This advancement removes a key obstacle that has deterred some growers from planting sorghum in the past.

Irrigation efficiency and drought resilience

Sorghum is commonly planted as a dryland crop, but it can also thrive under limited irrigation. One of the crop's strengths is its ability to withstand short periods without water, making it a valuable addition to fields with variable water availability.

For example, growers may split a field between corn or cotton and sorghum, concentrating irrigation on water-sensitive crops while knowing that sorghum can wait a few extra days without suffering significant yield losses. This flexibility allows growers to optimize their water resources more effectively.

As growers prepare for 2025, sorghum offers a compelling case for inclusion in crop rotations. Its low seed costs, drought resilience and benefits in crop rotation provide both economic and agronomic advantages.

USDA Announces United Sorghum Checkoff Program Board Appointments

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced in October the appointment of four members to serve on the United Sorghum Checkoff Program's board of directors. All four appointees will serve three-year terms, which will begin December 2024.

Macey Mueller of Halstead, Kansas; Kim Baldwin of McPherson, Kansas; and Kevin Pshigoda of Perryton, Texas, were all reappointed to the board while Dale Stolfus of Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania, is a new appointment, at-large.

The 13-member United Sorghum Checkoff Program Board is composed of nine sorghum farmers who represent the three states with the largest sorghum production – Kansas, Texas and Oklahoma – 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 on the board's website, sorghumcheckoff.com.



Pictured from left to right is Macey Mueller, Kim Baldwin, Kevin Pshigoda, Dale Stolfus

Sorghum Checkoff Announces Leadership Sorghum Class VII

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program recently announced the members selected for Leadership Sorghum Class VII. This program, hosted by the Sorghum Checkoff, is designed to cultivate the next generation of leaders and advocates for the sorghum industry.

"The strength of the sorghum industry depends on developing leaders who can advocate for its future," Sorghum Checkoff Chairman Kendall Hodgson said. "With growing demand and evolving challenges in agriculture, Leadership Sorghum plays a vital role in preparing producers to represent and promote our industry with knowledge and confidence."

Seventeen farmers from nine states have been selected to participate in the program's seventh class:

- Nicholas Bridgeforth – Tanner, Alabama
- Dylan J. Moyer – Irvington, Illinois
- Jared Stegman – Dodge City, Kansas
- Lesley Schmidt – Spearville, Kansas
- Sydney Bacon – Salina, Kansas
- Weston Schmidt – Syracuse, Kansas
- Bryan Thomas – St. Charles, Missouri
- Camden Liska – Verdigre, Nebraska
- Brian Null – Hobart, Oklahoma
- Kyle Supplee – Thompsettown, Pennsylvania
- David Gunter – Lexington, South Carolina

- Carson Polasek – Tynan, Texas
- Daniel Sell – Booker, Texas
- Heath Heinrich – Slaton, Texas
- Matthew Bartek – La Grange, Texas
- Reagan Ivey – Robstown, Texas
- Will Braack – Hereford, Texas

"Leadership Sorghum is instrumental in shaping the future of our industry by equipping producers with the skills and knowledge needed to lead and advocate at every level," Leadership Sorghum program director Shelee Padgett said. "The leaders we develop today are vital to ensuring the success and growth of the sorghum industry tomorrow. We are excited to work with Class VII as they embark on this journey to strengthen both their operations and our collective voice."

Through a combination of hands-on experiences and classroom-style learning, participants will gain insight into the sorghum value chain, the role of checkoffs and advocacy groups in supporting the industry and the future outlook for the crop. Leadership Sorghum also offers opportunities for professional development and networking. The first session will take place Dec. 10-12, 2024, in Lubbock, Texas, during the Sorghum Checkoff board meeting. For more details about the Leadership Sorghum program, visit LeadSorghum.com.

Sorghum Checkoff Hosts National Media at Culinary Event in New York

In late September, the Sorghum Checkoff hosted an interactive culinary event at the top of the World Trade Center in New York City, inviting national food and health media and influencers, including representatives from the TODAY Show and Martha Stewart Living. The event highlighted sorghum's unique qualities and encouraged its use in culinary content. Checkoff board member Kim Baldwin and staff shared insights into sorghum's sustainability and nutritional benefits, aiming to raise awareness and appreciation for this versatile grain.

Guests enjoyed cooking demos by Corporate Chef Consultant Chase Obenchain and two-time Emmy winner and former Top Chef contestant Ryan Scott, showcasing sorghum's culinary poten-

tial. For more on sorghum's benefits, read Martha Stewart Living's article, visit marthastewart.com/what-is-sorghum-8723400.



Pictured from left to right is Chef Chase Obenchain, Lanier Dabruzzi, Chef Ryan Scott, Kim Baldwin, Clint White, Norma Ritz-Johnson

Kady Figge Joins Sorghum Checkoff as New Communications Manager

This past summer, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program welcomed Kady Figge as its new Communications Manager. In this position, Figge plays a key role in the planning, development and execution of both internal and external communications for the Sorghum Checkoff. She oversees activities within the information, communication and education department and collaborates strategically with other program areas to enhance communication efforts. Additionally, Figge is leading various communication projects that align with the program's strategic communication plan.

"Kady's deep-rooted passion for agriculture and her diverse experience make her a fantastic addition to our team," Sorghum Checkoff Director of Communications Clint White said in a statement in July. "Her background in agricultural communications and hands-on experience in the industry will be invaluable in advancing our communication goals."

Figge's connection to agriculture runs deep. Growing up in Onaga, a small town in northeast Kansas, she spent much of her time on her fami-

ly's registered Angus cattle operation where she developed a strong foundation in agriculture. She actively participated in local, state and national cattle shows and honed her public speaking skills through various contests. Her involvement in 4-H and FFA further fostered her love for agriculture.

She holds a bachelor's degree in agricultural communications and journalism from Kansas State University, where she also earned a secondary major in global food systems leadership with a focus on community engagement and minors in agricultural sales and animal sciences and industry. During her time at K-State, Figge was actively involved in organizations like the National Agri-Marketing Association, Agricultural Communicators

of Tomorrow and Sigma Alpha Professional Agricultural Sorority.

"I'm excited to be part of a team dedicated to advocating for the sorghum industry and supporting the farmers who drive it," Figge said. "I look forward to helping tell the story of sorghum and the incredible work of our producers."



SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

Nov 28-29 Thanksgiving Holiday
Office Closed

Dec 10-12 Leadership Sorghum Class VII - Session I
Lubbock, Texas

Dec 11-12 Sorghum Checkoff Annual Board Meeting
Lubbock, Texas

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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