SORGHUM CHECKOFF
NEWSLETTER
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Sorghum and Millet – Close Cousins?

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

Recently, I was asked by a fellow Sorghum Checkoff staff member if sorghum was considered a millet. My answer generated a considerable amount of interest, not only from the person who asked the question, but also from other staff members as well.

The short answer is no, sorghum is not a millet! This raises the question of just how closely they are related and why the two crops are lumped together on social media and other outlets.

To answer the first question, we need to take a dive into what is called taxonomy – the scientific study of identifying, naming and grouping of organisms based on their shared characteristics. Most of you, at some point in school, were introduced to the Linnaeus system with the general categories going from very broad to very specific: Kingdom – Phylum – Class – Order – Family – Tribe – Genus – Species. All grasses are in the Poaceae family. Sorghum and millet actually diverge early on and are in different subfamily groups. Surprisingly, sorghum is more closely related to corn because they are both in the same tribe.

From an origin standpoint, sorghum originated in Africa, where millet has multiple origins across Africa and Asia. These origins have shaped the grains' abilities to adapt to different regions.

So why are sorghum and millet often tied together on social media, in popular articles and sometimes even in scientific publications? The easy answer is that they simply look a lot alike. Even an experienced agronomist can have trouble telling them apart from any significant distance. Their height can be similar, and both produce grain panicles. However, the grain of millet is considerably smaller than that of sorghum. Up close, each crop has very distinct characteristics.

Another reason they are often grouped together is they are both known for their resilience to harsh environmental conditions, particularly drought and high temperatures, making them both suitable for dryland farming in semi-arid regions. They are traditionally grown in subsistence farming systems, especially in Africa and parts of Asia. Due to their adaptability, sorghum and millet reduce the risk of crop failure in dry climates, supporting food security and resilience against climate

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change. Both are considered ancient grains.

A final similarity between the two species is that they are considered dual-purpose crops. The grain is used for both animal and human consumption, while the rest of the plant can be fed to livestock as hay or grazed.

In summary, sorghum and millet, like all grasses, are related. However, purely from a classification standpoint, they are very distant cousins who happen to have evolved to be able to grow and thrive in similar environments.

Resilience and Opportunity in the Face of Change: Navigating the China-Brazil Sorghum Agreement

By John Duff, Sorghum Checkoff Consultant, Serō Ag Strategies

Much has been said about the recent China-Brazil sorghum export agreement. It's no secret that this deal has raised concerns about the long-term impact on U.S. farmers. Any shift in market dynamics—whether through lost access or a competitor gaining ground—affects farmers of all crops. U.S. agriculture is interconnected, and reliance on diverse crop mixes often serves as a critical tool to weather challenges such as drought, fluctuating prices and sustainability needs.

While some view this agreement as a signal of impending challenges for U.S. sorghum, it's important to keep a balanced perspective. First, U.S. sorghum remains essential to meeting China's growing demand, particularly for high-value uses like baijiu production and livestock feed. This fact underscores the critical need to maintain strong sorghum acreage to support this demand.

Second, the threat posed by the agreement is more significant in the long term. While the headlines may paint a bleak picture, Brazil currently lacks the capacity to export sorghum at the scale of the U.S. Historically, Brazil's sorghum production has played a supplementary role, often serving as a backup crop planted after corn planting windows have closed. To match U.S. export volumes, Brazil would need a significant overhaul of its sorghum industry, which is unlikely in the short term.

Meanwhile, the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) has rolled up its sleeves and is diligently working to diversify market opportunities and expand awareness of sorghum's unique attributes worldwide. Beyond China, U.S. sorghum is gaining traction in high-value markets like aquaculture, pet food, sustainable feed and low carbon fuel applications. These efforts ensure the U.S. remains the world's leading and most reliable supplier of export-ready sorghum, known globally for its unmatched quality and grade.

Moreover, U.S. farmers benefit from a highly developed transportation and logistics infrastructure, giving them a competitive edge over countries like Brazil. With an extensive network of well-maintained roads and railways, U.S. sorghum producers can ensure fast, dependable delivery to international markets. This robust infrastructure plays a key role in sustaining global trade and meeting market demands efficiently.

China has undoubtedly been a vital partner for U.S. sorghum, offering premiums above corn prices and driving extraordinary export volumes. But it's important to remember that sorghum's success predates China's dominance in the market. Over a decade ago, U.S. sorghum supported domestic markets, such as livestock and ethanol production, while maintaining a foothold in international trade. Those markets, though less lucrative than today's Chinese premiums, highlight sorghum's versatility and adaptability.

As we look ahead, the choice is clear: We can dwell on the challenges or focus on the opportunities. At the USCP, we choose to serve farmers by developing relationships, expanding knowledge and advocating for market access. By identifying and cultivating emerging markets, we're fostering a sustainable future for sorghum producers.

Sorghum Checkoff Elects Ethan Miller as New Chairman and Swears in New Board Member

The Sorghum Checkoff Board of Directors elected new leadership and swore in a new director at its December meeting. Pictured from left to right is Tim Lust - CEO, David Schemm - Secretary, Kim Baldwin - Vice Chairwoman, Ethan Miller - Chairman, Norma Ritz Johnson - Executive Director and Zack Rendel - Treasurer.

One new board member appointed by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack was sworn in, and three other producers began their second terms after reappointment by Secretary Vilsack during the United Sorghum Checkoff Program's annual December meeting. The board also elected Ethan Miller of Columbia, Missouri, as the 2025 chairman.

Past Chairman Adam Schindler of Reliance, South Dakota, was recognized for his dedicated service as he concluded his term on the USCP Board.

"I am honored to take on the role of Chairman and continue driving innovation and opportunities for sorghum producers," said Miller. "Our industry's resilience and adaptability are key to unlocking sorghum's potential, and I look forward to working alongside this exceptional team to advance our mission."

The newly elected USCP Executive Committee and newly appointed or reappointed Board Members include:

Executive Committee

- Chair: Ethan Miller, Columbia, Missouri
- Vice Chair: Kim Baldwin, McPherson, Kansas
- Secretary: David Schemm, Sharon Springs, Kansas
- Treasurer: Zack Rendel, Miami, Oklahoma

Newly Appointed Board Members

- Dale L. Stoltzfus, Schuylkill Haven, Pennsylvania (At-Large)

Reappointed Board Members to Second Terms

- Macey A. Mueller, Halstead, Kansas
- Kim Baldwin, McPherson, Kansas
- Kevin Pshigoda, Perryton, Texas

"USCP continues to thrive because of the dedication of our producers and leaders who work tirelessly to support the sorghum industry," said USCP Executive Director Norma Ritz Johnson. "This Board represents a wealth of experience and vision that will help us navigate the challenges and opportunities ahead."

The newly appointed and reappointed directors will serve terms ending in December 2027. The 13-member USCP Board is composed of nine sorghum farmers representing the largest sorghum-producing states—Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas—and four at-large representatives from across the nation.

For more information about the USCP Board and its initiatives, visit *sorghumcheckoff.com*.

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Adam Schindler Completes Sorghum Checkoff Board Term

The Sorghum Checkoff would like to thank Adam Schindler for his years of commitment and hard work in the sorghum industry. Adam Schindler, a sixth-generation farmer from Reliance, South Dakota, served two terms on the board and was a member of Leadership Sorghum Class I. He also led the USCP board as Chairman from 2022–2023.

Sorghum Checkoff Celebrates the Addition of New Sorghum Forms to USDA's FoodData Central

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP) announced in November that four new forms of sorghum have been officially added to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's FoodData Central Database. This significant milestone ensures that the most up-to-date nutritional information on commonly used sorghum products is readily available to consumers and food companies amid growing demand for sorghum.

In collaboration with USCP, USDA collected samples from sorghum farms across the United States, gathered metadata and conducted nutrient analyses. The newly updated sorghum forms now available in FoodData Central are: whole grain, pearled grain, pearled flour and bran.

"This is a pivotal step in making sorghum information more accessible and understood by both consumers and the food industry," said Lanier Dabruzzi, MS, RD, LD, director of nutrition & food innovation at Sorghum Checkoff. "We are excited about the potential growth this brings to the sorghum market."

USCP will continue working with the USDA's Methods and Application of Food Composition Laboratory (MAFCL) to include data on cooked grains and popped sorghum varieties.

Discover more about sorghum's nutrition at *sorghumcheckoff.com/consumers*.

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

Jan 28-30 — **International Production & Processing Expo**
Atlanta, Georgia

Mar 2-4 — **Leadership Sorghum Class VII – Session II**
Denver, Colorado

Mar 2-4 — **2025 Commodity Classic**
Denver, Colorado

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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