

Choosing a Sorghum Hybrid for 2026

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

Timely rainfall in 2025 resulted in exceptionally good yields in many sorghum fields across the sorghum belt. These yields are a reflection of better hybrids sold by seed companies. One of the most important decisions growers can make is which hybrid to plant. Historically, the release of new sorghum hybrids has been slower than some of the other crops, but that has not been the case in recent years.

A study published in *Crop Science*, conducted by scientists at Corteva™ Agriscience and Kansas State University, revealed that yield gain of Pioneer® commercial hybrids increased 24 lbs/acre per year from 1963 to 2017. It is especially noteworthy that yield gain accelerated in the most recent years of the study (see bar graph), and I have little doubt that this yield increase has continued in recent years.

In the coming years, growers should expect the rate of yield gain to increase as new breeding techniques are adopted. We read a lot about how artificial intelligence is going to increase the rate of technological gains in all areas of our lives, and I believe this will also be true in sorghum hybrid development.

Our knowledge of the genetic makeup of sorghum through sequencing and mapping has

helped us identify genes with valuable traits. Marker-assisted selection is helping breeders select desirable plants much earlier in the breeding process than ever before. This knowledge can now be used in predictive models to help breeders select which parents to cross that will have the highest probability in producing superior hybrids. AI can then be used to analyze massive data sets collected by drones and even satellites to assess plant traits quickly and accurately. What all of this means is better hybrids for your farm arriving faster than ever before.

Higher yield is always the goal and is accomplished in two ways. First, by simply having a higher yield potential under optimum conditions, and second, by having better defensive traits that equip the hybrid to better withstand abiotic (nonliving) and biotic (living) stress.

Abiotic stress is typically caused by drought and high temperatures. Since sorghum tends to be grown in dry environments, sorghum breeders spend a large portion of their efforts developing hybrids that can withstand periods of drought and still maintain yield potential. Often overlooked by growers is the importance of heat stress. Much of the U.S. has experienced elevated

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temperatures over the last few years, and this is not expected to change any time soon. More effort is going into breeding for heat stress than in the past.

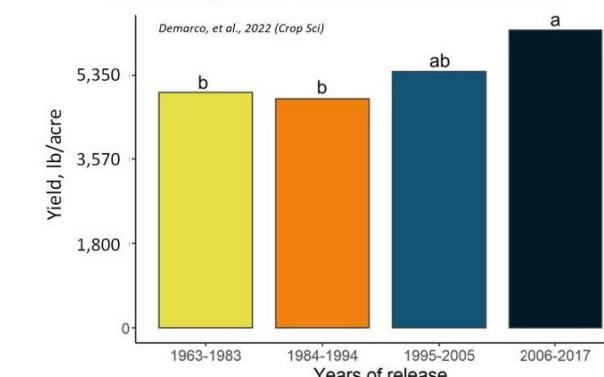
Biotic stress is usually from insects or diseases. Sorghum companies have placed considerable effort into identifying hybrids and parent lines with sorghum aphid tolerance. Most new hybrids now have tolerance to sorghum aphid. For those regions where diseases are an issue, better anthracnose resistance has been incorporated in some of the new hybrids.

Hybrids with specific herbicide tolerances were introduced by the industry a few years ago. We are now seeing these traits incorporated into elite genetics.

As plans are being made for the 2026 season, contact your seed company representative and ask

what new hybrids are in their lineup, and consider planting at least a few acres of a new hybrid on your farm.

U.S. Sorghum Yield Gain 1963-2017



Sorghum Checkoff Elects Kim Baldwin as Board Chair

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program elected Kim Baldwin of McPherson, Kansas, as chair during its annual December board of directors meeting.

Baldwin brings 15 years of farming experience to the role and previously served as vice chair. She farms with her husband and their two children and plays an active role in her family's wholesale and retail popcorn and sorghum business.

She holds a bachelor's degree in agricultural extension education from New Mexico State University and a master's degree in educational leadership and administration from William Woods University. Baldwin is also a graduate of the Kansas Agriculture and Rural Leadership Program.

Originally from New Mexico, Baldwin is a citizen of the Delaware Tribe of Indians and the Cherokee Nation. She spent nearly two decades in public education and continues to serve her community through several local boards.

"The board plays a critical role in shaping the future of the sorghum industry," Baldwin said. "Sorghum offers real opportunity, from supporting human health to expanding value-added innovation. I'm excited to work with the board to help position this crop for long-term growth and relevance in the marketplace."

"Kim brings a rare combination of producer experience, leadership and education," said Norma Ritz Johnson, executive director of the United Sorghum Checkoff Program. "Her perspective and

commitment will serve sorghum farmers well as the board continues investing in research, markets and demand for U.S. sorghum."

The board also elected Zack Rendel as vice chair, Scott Irlbeck as secretary and Dale Stoltzfus as treasurer.

USCP recognized outgoing board members and past chair Kendall Hodgson and Jeff Zortman for their service as they roll off the board.

The 13-member USCP board includes nine sorghum farmers from Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, along with four at-large national representatives. Learn more at SorghumCheckoff.com.



Pictured from left to right is Norma Ritz Johnson - Executive Director, Zack Rendel - Vice Chair, Kim Baldwin - Chair, Scott Irlbeck - Secretary, Dale Stoltzfus - Treasurer and Ethan Miller - Past Chairman

Leadership Sorghum Spotlight: From Comfort Zone to Crop Innovation - Joel Huesby's, Class VI

By Sorghum Checkoff, Kyra Holt

Joel Huesby, an organic sorghum farmer from Touchet, Washington, took an uncommon path into sorghum production. His approach to farming has always been shaped by a willingness to learn, adapt and try something new, which eventually led him to be a member of Leadership Sorghum Class VI.

"Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone," Huesby said.

That belief has guided him throughout his career and is reflected in his focus on stewardship, innovation and long-term sustainability.

In 1994, Huesby decided to reshape his farm. He shifted entirely to organic production at a time when few others in his region were doing so. Huesby said the move felt right to him and he found success in understanding the people he serves.

"Who is my customer, and what do they want?" Huesby said. "That drives every decision I make."

That approach led him to build direct relationships with regional flour mills and distillers, who valued the organic grains he produced.

While researching alternative crops, Huesby began looking for something that could thrive in the Pacific Northwest and offer new value to his buyers. That search led him to sorghum.

"Being a horse of a different color, I am always looking for something that someone else is either unable or unwilling to do," Huesby said.

Sorghum aligns with Huesby's long-term vision for his operation. He said the crop is resilient, efficient and suited for the dry conditions common in his region.



"Water conservation is huge to me," Huesby said. "And sorghum fits that bill."

The farm has also become home to four generations of the Huesby family, who share daily life and family meals regularly.

"Most of those meals are all ingredients that we produced: the milk, the beef, the eggs and the flour," Huesby said. "We eat better than the fancy restaurants in town."

For Huesby, the farm is more than a business. It is a responsibility to the generations who came before and those who will come after.

"You have a heritage that is behind you and a legacy that is in front of you," Huesby said. "I take that really seriously."

His time in Leadership Sorghum strengthened that perspective by expanding his understanding of the influence producers have in shaping the future of the industry, Huesby said.

"The Sorghum Checkoff instilled in me the importance of marketing, research and promotion," Huesby said.

The lessons he learned in Leadership Sorghum continue to guide his decisions today, he said. Huesby focuses on growing markets through relationships, experimenting with new opportunities and building a resilient operation that honors both the history of his family and the needs of the next generation. To learn more about Leadership Sorghum, visit LeadSorghum.com.



Kendall Hodgson Completes Sorghum Checkoff Board Term

The Sorghum Checkoff thanks Kendall Hodgson for his leadership and long-standing service to the sorghum industry. A fourth-generation farmer from Little River, Kansas, Hodgson served on the United Sorghum Checkoff Program board, including as chairman, and brought a steady, producer-focused perspective shaped by decades of farming and community leadership.



Jeff Zortman Completes Sorghum Checkoff Board Term

The Sorghum Checkoff thanks Jeff Zortman for his service and leadership on behalf of the sorghum industry. A producer from Fowler, Kansas, Zortman brought a data-driven mindset and strong interest in technology and innovation to his work on the United Sorghum Checkoff Program board. His perspective as a full-time farmer and advocate for progressive production practices helped support the checkoff's mission and future-focused efforts.

SORGHUM INDUSTRY EVENTS

January 27-29 International Production & Processing Expo
Atlanta, GA

February 3-5 Leadership Sorghum VII - Session V
Washington, DC

February 26-28 2025 Commodity Classic
San Antonio, TX

For more events, visit sorghumcheckoff.com/news-and-events/



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USCP MISSION

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