SORGHUM CHECKOFF NEWSLETTER
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WHAT'S INSIDE

SORGHUM CHECKOFF

Sorghum: An Opportunistic Crop That Pays

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

For many growers, grain sorghum fits best as an opportunistic crop—one that can take advantage of timely rainfall, keep input costs in check and improve the performance of other crops in the rotation. With relatively low production costs and strong agronomic benefits, sorghum remains a practical option for farmers looking to manage risk while maintaining yield potential.

"One of sorghum's biggest advantages is its affordability."

One of sorghum's biggest advantages is its affordability. Seed costs typically range from $6 to $19 per acre, depending on seeding rate and seed treatments. That's significantly lower than many competing row crops, helping reduce upfront investment and financial risk.

Sorghum also tends to have few insect and disease issues. Concerns about sorghum aphid have been greatly reduced in the last few years, with many high performing hybrids having good sorghum aphid tolerance. If aphid populations are present, they can be effectively controlled with insecticides such as Sivanto Prime®, Transform® or Sefina®.

The dry climate across much of the Great Plains helps keep disease pressure low. In more humid regions like the Southeast, anthracnose is the primary concern, but selecting hybrids with good tolerance can greatly reduce the risk.

While known as a drought tolerant crop, sorghum will take advantage of timely rainfall, making it a good fit in areas where precipitation can be unpredictable. This flexibility allows farmers to plant sorghum knowing it can respond when conditions turn favorable while still tolerating short periods of stress.

Sorghum's value extends beyond the current growing season, providing measurable benefits when used in crop rotations. When rotated with cotton, disease cycles are broken, which can plague continuous cotton systems. Residue from sorghum also helps conserve soil moisture and protect emerging cotton seedlings from wind damage. A 2017 Texas A&M University study found cotton yields in-

creased 26% when rotated with sorghum compared to continuous cotton.

Research near Mead, Nebraska, showed that soybeans planted after sorghum produced a 16% yield increase compared to continuous soybeans. Improvements were linked to better soil fertility, improved soil structure, stronger weed control and fewer pest problems. Even corn can benefit from following sorghum. A five-year Kansas State University trial found corn yields increased over 8% when planted after sorghum compared to continuous corn.

These gains highlight how sorghum contributes to better soil health, rainfall retention and improved nutrient cycling in crop rotations.

Sorghum is most often grown as a dryland crop, but it also performs well under limited irrigation. Its ability to tolerate short periods without water gives growers flexibility when managing irrigation systems. When splitting a circle with corn or cotton, irrigation can be prioritized for the more water-sensitive crops while sorghum waits a few extra days without significant yield loss. That flexibility helps maximize water efficiency, especially in regions where irrigation capacity is limited.

For growers looking to manage costs and reduce risk, sorghum remains a practical choice. Its low seed cost, ability to capitalize on timely rainfall and benefits to crops that follow make it a valuable tool in many cropping systems.

2025/26 U.S. Sorghum Crop Graded At No. 1 Certification For Seventh Consecutive Year

The U.S. Grains & BioProducts Council (USGBC) released its 2025/26 Sorghum Quality Report, and for the seventh year in a row, U.S. sorghum was, on average, graded above the necessary requirements for U.S. No. 1 certification.

"The Council has built a reputation as a trusted partner and source of information for global grain and grain co-product purchasers, who can feel secure in knowing exactly what to expect when they choose U.S. agricultural goods to meet their needs," said Mark Wilson, USGBC chairman.

"We develop this report each year as a service to U.S. sorghum's international customers and to display the outstanding work U.S. sorghum farmers do every day to produce the world's finest sorghum."

The report, funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service Agricultural Trade Promotion (USDA-FAS) program and the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (USCP), provides international customers and other interested parties accurate, unbiased information about the 2025/26 U.S. sorghum crop.

Data was drawn from 102 samples collected from 18 participating elevators and one farmer in the central and southern regions of the U.S., an area representing nearly 100 percent of all U.S. sorghum exports.

The samples were collected by the Amarillo Grain Exchange and analyzed at SGS North America in Vancouver, Washington, where scientists calculated averages and standard deviations for each quality factor tested and reported results for the U.S. aggregate.

Total sorghum damage came in at 0.1 percent in the aggregate and no heat damage was observed in the samples while protein content was registered at 11.6 percent. Starch concentration was tested at 72.8 percent and oil measured at 3.5 percent.

Additionally, tannins were absent from the sorghum samples for the seventh year in a row.

To download the full 2025/26 Sorghum Quality Report, visit *www.sorghumcheckoff.com/press-releases/2026/*.

Taking the ITCH OUT of Sorghum

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

Anyone who has ever read one of my articles or heard one of my presentations knows I am a strong advocate for the attributes of grain sorghum. However, one characteristic of sorghum grain that I could certainly do without is the skin irritation, or itchiness, caused by its grain dust at harvest. Dust from other grains can cause itchiness, but few would argue to the extent caused by grain sorghum. So, what causes sorghum grain dust to itch and is there anything we can do about it?

"Interestingly, dust from rice grown in the U.S. in the early 1900s was known to cause itchiness."

Researchers at Kansas State University asked this question and hypothesize that much of the itchiness is related to the structure of the glumes that surround each grain in the grain head. Grain sorghum glumes are covered by tiny, rigid, hair-like appendages called trichomes. These trichomes are known to be a primary contributor to the total dust produced by cereal grains at harvest.

Interestingly, dust from rice grown in the U.S. in the early 1900s was known to cause itchiness. The rice varieties grown at that time had "hairy" glumes like sorghum. In the 1920s, rice varieties with "hairless" glumes gained popularity and, as a result, the dust produced at rice harvest was greatly reduced! Currently, all U.S. rice varieties have hairless glumes. The technical term for "hairless" is "glabrous."

The researchers at Kansas State theorize that if sorghum glumes were hairless, then like rice, the reduction of dust produced at harvest would address the source of irritation, leading to less itchiness. The problem is that all commercial sorghum hybrids grown in the U.S. have hairy glumes! This led to the search for hairless sorghum glume germplasm that could be introduced into U.S. sorghum hybrids.

Following the screening of hundreds of diverse sorghum lines, representing all the major sorghum races, a few hairless glume lines were identified. Dust production from thrashed sorghum heads of a U.S. hybrid was then compared to one of the hairless glume lines. Dust production was found to be greatly reduced from the hairless glume line!

Armed with this discovery, the next step will be to use modern breeding techniques to insert the hairless glume trait into elite U.S. breeding lines to develop what will hopefully be low-dust, itch-free sorghum!

The sorghum molecular breeding program at K-State is positioned to make this a reality. They specialize in identifying novel sorghum genetics, such as glabrous sorghum, and devising strategies to rapidly translate into commercial sorghums with molecular breeding strategies and public-private partnerships.

Although taking the itch out of sorghum will likely not add any additional profit in growing sorghum, the relief from skin irritation will be much appreciated by sorghum growers!

Sorghum Checkoff Showcases Momentum at 2026 Commodity Classic

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program delivered a strong showing at this year's Commodity Classic in San Antonio, where more than 12,000 attendees gathered for one of agriculture's largest annual events.

The event created a key opportunity for Team Sorghum to connect with producers and industry partners from across the country. Conversations focused on sorghum's role in today's market and its expanding opportunities across food, feed and fuel.

The Sorghum Checkoff booth served as a central hub throughout the event. Growers stopped in for updates on current programs and initiatives while engaging in discussions on how sorghum continues to deliver value from the farm to emerging markets.

A highlight of the week included the debut of the new Sorghum Brand Anthem video. The video underscores the resilience, innovation and forward momentum driving the sorghum industry, while reinforcing a unified message for growers and partners nationwide. Scan the QR code to watch to full video.

Throughout the event, Team Sorghum engaged attendees with hands-on experiences and product demonstrations. Complimentary sorghum snacks drew steady traffic, while live popped sorghum seasoning demonstrations with Chef Chase showcased the grain's versatility in food applications.

The checkoff also partnered with the San Antonio Humane Society to host the Sorghum Puppy Patch. The activation offered attendees a place to recharge while spending time with adoptable puppies, while also highlighting sorghum's role in the growing pet food market.

The combined efforts helped reinforce sorghum's value across diverse end uses and created meaningful engagement with attendees across the industry.

The United Sorghum Checkoff Program extends its appreciation to Team Sorghum for delivering a successful presence at Commodity Classic. Continued collaboration and commitment from growers and partners remain essential as the industry works to expand markets and build long-term demand for U.S. sorghum.

Sorghum Industry Events

April 27-29	**Petfood Forum** Kansas City, MO
April 30	**Leadership Sorghum Class VIII Applications Due**
May 25	**Memorial Day-Office Closed** Lubbock, TX

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

SORGHUM CHECKOFF

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USCP Mission

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

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