

# Nebraska Sorghum



The quarterly newsletter of the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board, the Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association, and the Sorghum

Army

[www.nebraskasorghum.org](http://www.nebraskasorghum.org)



## NGSB/NeSPA Events: Spring 2020

Sorghum Board Filing Deadline - May 8, 2020

NGSB Quarterly Meeting - June 4, Lincoln

NeSPA Quarterly Meeting - June 2020, TBA

## 2020 Producer Resources:

**Consider Sorghum in 2020:**

[Click Here](#)

**US Drought Monitor:**

[Click Here](#)

**Grain Basis Maps:**

[Click Here](#)

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## COVID-19 Resources

NGSB and NeSPA thank our federal, state, and local leaders for their extraordinary service during the COVID-19 pandemic. Click here for additional resources from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

[Click Here](#)

# Dozens Gather at NCTA for the 2020 Sorghum Symposium

Dozens of producers, educators, and industry representatives met at the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture (NCTA) on January 30th for the 2020 Nebraska Sorghum Symposium. Educational topics included weather and agronomic updates from industry leaders, Al Dutcher, Dr. Brent Bean, and Strahinja Stepanovic. Mr. Jerad Reimers, Ag Director for Congressman Adrian Smith, gave a brief D.C. update and Mr. Zach Simon from the United Sorghum Checkoff Program discussed marketing strategy. Mr. Chuck Burr, Manager of the acclaimed TAPS Program moderated a panel of sorghum producers, Mike Baker, Slater Chandler, and Tracy Zink. NGSB Executive Director, Nate Blum presented on leveraging social media and moderated a video call with the Hyxus team who shared their traceability software.

Nearly sixty people attended the event in person. The sessions were each live-streamed on the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board Facebook page, garnering hundreds of views. The live-streams can be accessed here:

[Click Here](#)



Conklin representative, Dennis Nun talks with a producer during a break



Attendees at the 2020 Nebraska Sorghum Symposium pose for a photo between sessions

## 2020 SORGHUM SYMPOSIUM

Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture  
404 E 7th Street, Curtis, NE 69025

### Schedule

Thursday, January 30, 2020

- 9:00 AM **Registration**  
Coffee & Donuts
- 9:25 **Welcome** – Auditorium
- 9:30 **How Will the 2019 Weather Impacts Affect 2020 Crop Production?**  
Al Dutcher, UNL Associate Geoscientist
- 10:00 **Sorghum Production & Management**  
Dr. Brent Bean, USCP, Director of Agronomy
- 10:30 **Refreshment Break** – Atrium – Sponsored by S&W Seed Company
- 11:45 **D.C./Farm Bill Update**  
Jerad Reimers, Ag Director, Office of Congressman Adrian Smith
- 12:15 **Lunch** – Sponsor:
- 1:00 **Grain Sorghum Variety Performance in 15 and 30 Inch Rows**  
Strahinja Stepanovic, Extension Educator – Cropping Systems (SW NE)
- 1:30 **Marketing Update**  
Zach Simon, Regional Marketing Director, USCP
- 2:00 **How to Win an Argument without Arguing – Leveraging Social Media to Tell Your Story to Consumers**  
Nate Blum, Executive Director, Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board/Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association
- 2:30 **Refreshment Break** – Trade Fair – Sponsored by CPI
- 2:45 **Sorghum TAPS Program Panel**  
Chuck Burr, West Central Research & Extension Center, with Tracy Zink, Slater Chandler, and Mike Baker
- 3:15 **Herbicide Development Update**  
Tanner Antonik, Advanta Seeds
- 3:45 **A Path to Modern Agriculture Empowered by Traceability**  
Bruce Bjorkland, Hyxus via Google Meetup
- 4:00 **Closing Remarks**
- 5:00 **NeSPA Annual Membership Meeting**

Say **THANK YOU** to our 2020 Sponsors!

Farm Credit Services of America  
BASF  
S&W Seed Company  
CPI

Nutrien  
Plains Equipment Group  
Syngenta  
Red Willow Aviation and  
Spraying Inc.

Syngenta  
Nutrien  
Kugler Company  
YieldChampions.com  
Extreme Ag



Attendees participated in a variety of educational sessions

# Enlist in the Sorghum Army!



The Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board (NGSB) and the Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association (NeSPA) implemented several new initiatives in 2019. The creation of the "Sorghum Army" campaign has been one of the most creative and successful to date. But, what is the "Sorghum Army"? Why has this campaign been successful, and by what metric? Let us explain.

The "Sorghum Army", led by the mascot, "Sergeant Sorghum" is marketing. Pure and simple. The concept was created with the original intention of providing a tough, resilient, and relatable character around which young producers, many of whom may have never grown sorghum, could rally around. Moreover, we wanted to create a sense of identity, community, and pride behind which growers of all ages could coalesce. In a sense, "Sergeant Sorghum" is a cultural touchstone in the sorghum community.

Interestingly, we learned very early on that the general public is also attracted to the concept of the "Sorghum Army". Consumers with little to no experience with sorghum find the image novel, new, and captivating. For example, NGSB offered t-shirts and caps featuring the logo at the Nebraska State Fair and Husker Harvest Days in 2019. Supply simply could not meet demand for those items.

You might say, "Wow. People like free stuff. Who knew?" While that is true, through our social media presence and event awareness, we've had dozens of requests for the purchase of these items.... and, more importantly, regular inquiries about purchasing Nebraska sorghum.

More importantly, most consumers who see "Sergeant Sorghum" for the first time begin asking questions about the crop. By the time we've discussed the attributes of sorghum; Including traits such as gluten-free, sustainability, American-grown, non-GMO, low on the glycemic index, and high in antioxidants, the next question out of most people's mouths is, "Where can I buy sorghum?"

Considering the success of the "Sergeant Sorghum" NGSB and NeSPA are working to define the core tenets of the "Sorghum Army". Messages such as "I stand for American jobs." "I stand for soil health." and "I stand for water conservation" are a few of those platforms.

Through this messaging, we plan to undertake a marketing campaign which leverages coastally-located conscientious consumers whom are looking for a differentiated product that not only provides excellent nutrition, but also validates their social convictions. When someone purchases "Sorghum Army" merchandise, they become a de facto spokesperson for the sorghum industry, while also providing an ancillary source of revenue that Nebraska Sorghum can re-invest in education, research, and markets development right here at home.

Want to learn more about becoming a member of the "Sorghum Army"? Keep an eye on our website, and social media pages. We hope you'll join us on the front lines in the battle for value-added markets development!

**Click here to become a member:**



# Sorghum Shines at the 2020 Commodity Classic



*USDA Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, Bill Northey, addresses the NSP Board*

Commodity Classic has been America's largest farmer-led, farmer-focused agricultural and education annual convention for twenty-four years. The event brings growers, farm organizations, media members, and industry professionals together for educational sessions and networking over the course of four days each year. This year, Classic was held in beautiful San Antonio, Texas.

Nebraska Sorghum represented Nebraska farmers at the National Sorghum Producers (NSP) meeting, offering an update of activities in the state. Undersecretary Northey and American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) President, Zippy Duvall, also addressed NSP on USDA conservation and disaster programming and a new AFBF partnership with Bayer to address mental health and suicide prevention on the farm, respectively. "Some problems we just can't fix with tape and twine," Duvall wisely noted.



*USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue speaks about trade and rural connectivity at the Commodity Classic General Session*

NGSB and NeSPA Executive Director Nate Blum, NGSB/USCP Board member, Klint Stewart, and former NeSPA/NSP President Don Bloss spent the week meeting with media representatives, interacting with industry professionals on the immense trade floor, and conducted meetings with local and national partners.



*American Farm Bureau Federation President, Zippy Duvall, shares an AFBF/Bayer initiative intended to promote mental health and suicide prevention among farmers*



*NGSB/NeSPA Executive Director Nate Blum visits with Ms. Rhiannon Branch of Brownfield Ag News about sorghum trade and marketing*

# NeSPA Fights for Sorghum on Capital Hill

The Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association participated in a National Sorghum Producers Fly-In in Washington D.C. The meetings, which were held the first week of February, centered on trade, farm and disaster programs, and administration of double haploid technology. Past NeSPA and NSP Chairman, Don Bloss and NeSPA Executive Director, Nate Blum attended the meetings representing Nebraska Sorghum.

Bloss and Blum met with Nebraska's own Greg Ibach, Undersecretary for Agriculture Marketing and Regulatory Programs at USDA and with staff and members of both the House and Senate Ag Committees. Nebraska Sorghum also met with the entire Nebraska Congressional Delegation at the 73 year-old Nebraska Breakfast before meeting with members and staff individually. NeSPA is grateful to our federal delegation for their time and attention to the sorghum industry.

The week was filled with optimism about impending trade increases with China, Canada, Mexico, and Japan. However concerns about the affect of ad hoc disaster funding and rounds of market facilitation payments on the 2023 Farm Bill tempered the mood. Nebraska Sorghum is actively working to develop a briefing paper detailing the positive impacts on Nebraska farms during the recent trade crisis and disastrous 2019 growing season.

"2023 seems like a long time from now, but it's easier to board a train at the station than when it's barreling down the track," Blum stated. "If there exist incorrect perceptions among decision-makers on Capitol Hill about the truly invaluable impact that MFP payments in particular have had on Nebraska farms, we need to get in front of correcting those misconceptions sooner rather than later."

Nebraska Sorghum will never stop fighting for our farmers.



*NSP members and staff are briefed on sorghum issues prior to meetings at the USDA*



*Past NSP Chairman, Don Bloss, and the NSP team meet with Senate Ag Committee staff*



*Nebraska's Congressional Delegation speaks at the Nebraska Breakfast*



*Senator Deb Fischer poses with Bloss and Blum*



*Senator Ben Sasse and Blum*



*Congressman Adrian Smith poses with Bloss and Blum*

# Sorghum Cares: NeSPA Delivers Nebraska Veteran's Stories to Library of Congress



HUMANITIES NEBRASKA



NEBRASKA

Good Life. Great Sacrifice.

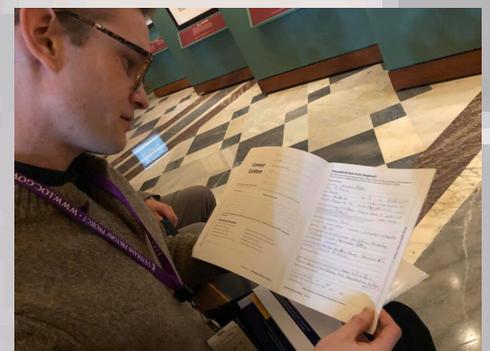
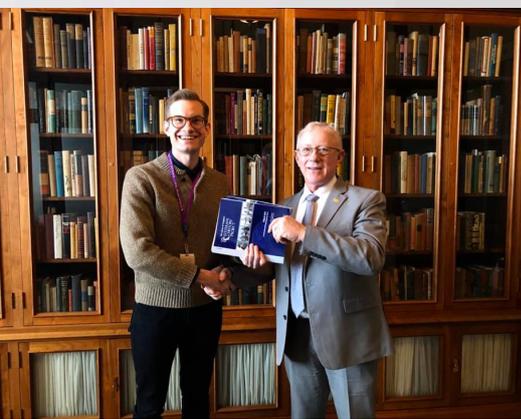
VETERANS' AFFAIRS



While in Washington D.C. for the NSP Fly-In, Don Bloss and Nate Blum delivered six Nebraska veteran interviews to the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress. These interviews, conducted as a part of the "Sorghum Cares: Preserving our Heritage. Building our Future" initiative, will be archived at the Library of Congress in perpetuity for the benefit of future generations of students and scholars. The initiative is a first-of-its-kind partnership between a growers association, the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs, and Humanities Nebraska.

"Every veteran's story is important. Whether they stormed the beaches of Normandy or served as a mechanic keeping our planes aloft during Operation Looking Glass, our veterans made great sacrifices for our nation. We were honored in 2020 to deliver stories from veterans of Vietnam, Korea, and even a 99 year-old veteran of WWII's Pacific Theatre," Blum stated. "It is a special privilege to come to know these exemplary Nebraskans. I highly recommend the experience of volunteering in this, yet another way, that the Nebraska Sorghum Producers give back to their state and nation."

Contact the Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association if you are interested in learning more about the Veterans History Project and how you can participate in the Sorghum Cares initiative.



*Veterans History Project Specialist, Mr. Owen Rogers, reads the biographical page of a Nebraska Vietnam Vet*

*NeSPA and NSP Past Chairman, Don Bloss, and NeSPA Executive Director Nate Blum present recorded interviews with Nebraska veterans to Mr. Owen Rogers, Veterans History Project Specialist at the Library of Congress*

# 2020 Sorghum Variety Plots Planned

The 2020 sorghum variety plot has been announced in Southwest Nebraska. Mike Baker, Chairman of the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board, will once again host a plot near Trenton Nebraska. The cost to participate is \$50 per variety. Interested seed companies can contact the Nebraska Sorghum Producers Association at: [sorghum.board@nebraska.gov](mailto:sorghum.board@nebraska.gov) for more information.

NeSPA is looking for a plot in Eastern Nebraska in 2020! Contact us if you, or someone you know, would like to host a plot.



*Attendees learn about the sorghum varieties planted in Mike Baker's plot near Trenton, NE at the 2019 Field Day*

## NGSB Partners with NCC for Remote Internships

The Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board partnered with Mr. Brandon Keller's Ag Marketing class at Northeast Community College (NECC) to work with eleven students as remote interns in the Spring of 2020. The students are studying business plans and how to calculate SWOT, risk and opportunity analyses. The mutually-beneficial partnership provides learning opportunities for NCC students while generating important data to evaluate potential sorghum-specific processing operations for Nebraska.

Along with our two in-office interns, these students bring the total number of young people working with NGSB to thirteen. Internships at NGSB are unpaid, but students receive mentorship, major-specific tasks, and a letter of recommendation commensurate with their work at the completion of the program.

Know a college student in need of an internship? They can email Nebraska Sorghum at [sorghum.board@nebraska.gov](mailto:sorghum.board@nebraska.gov) to learn more.

\*Due to the COVID-19 response, NGSB interns are now all working remotely via email, text and phone.



*Blum with one of the remote intern groups at Northeast Community College in Norfolk*

# Honoring Don Bloss: Farmer, Veteran, Sorghum Champion

Regardless of the crop they are growing, few farmers can boast as many years of devotion and successful advocacy for their industry as Mr. Don Bloss.

He got to know the NSP board of directors and the NeSPA board (then NGSPA) when he began entering the NSP Yield Contest in the 1990's. It wasn't long before an NGSPA board member, Mr. Gerald Simonsen encouraged him to apply to become more involved with the state growers association in 2007.

Don went on to serve for twelve years on the NGSPA/NeSPA and NSP. During that time, he was a part of the NSP Legislative Committee, was elected Vice Chairman and Chairman of the NGSPA, and also the Vice Chairman, Chairman, and Past Chairman of the National Sorghum Producers.

As a young man, Don also spent six years in the Army Reserves. Stationed on the East Coast during the Vietnam Era, he participated in riot control following the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He was honorably discharged with the rank of Specialist 6th Class.

In the Fall of 2019, Don announced his retirement from both the NeSPA and the NSP. Though his term ended on December 31, he continues to farm with his wife Lisa near Pawnee City, Nebraska. He has also expressed a gracious desire to remain involved in Nebraska Sorghum. We'll certainly benefit from his wisdom and institutional knowledge for as long as he'll offer it.

We are truly lucky to have had the leadership that Don has displayed on behalf of sorghum growers in Nebraska and across the nation. His actions exemplify what it means to be a servant leader.

**Thanks, Don!**



*Mr. Don Bloss*



*Mr. Don Bloss and NeSPA Executive Director Nate Blum in front of the Capitol in 2020*

# Message from the Director

## Building Value-Added Markets at Home and Abroad



Checkoff programs, such as the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board, share in common three core missions: Facilitate producer and consumer education, support research, and foster markets development. While each of these three unique functions are important, I believe that creating greater value-added marketing opportunities for sorghum is our highest immediate priority in Nebraska.

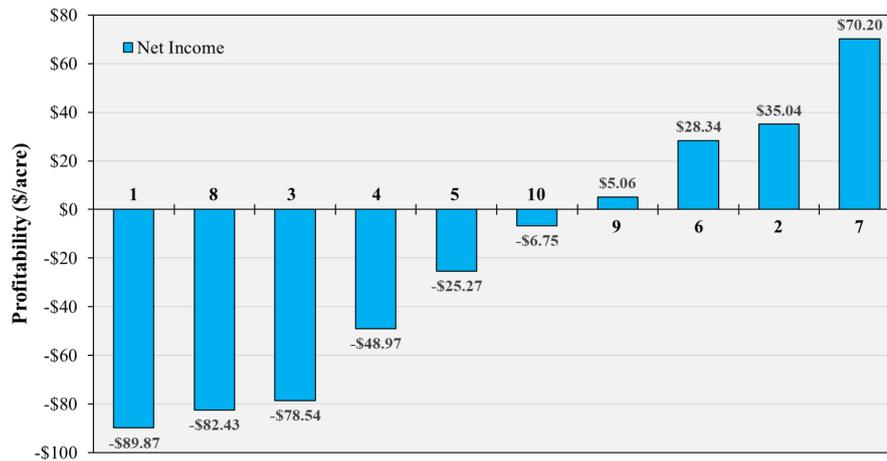
In 2019, Nebraska held the unfortunate distinction of boasting the lowest sorghum basis in the country. Conversely, South Dakota boasted the highest basis, thanks to bird seed production strategically placed in proximity to sorghum production. Interestingly, basis for other crops in Nebraska were also lower when compared to basis in neighboring states.

One reason for this could be that Nebraska farmers are exceptional at growing high quantities of grains, but are failed by the traditional commodity marketing model. We often grow increased bushels year over year, as do our neighbors, and then, in many cases, flood the market with grain at harvest time while passively relying on market forces to provide a fair price. This model is more beneficial to grain brokers than it is to producers over time.

Commodity markets are a staple of American agriculture. We need to continue to further develop international trade partners whom are best-served through that model. Yet, I would challenge readers to ruminate on this questions: How does the individual American farmer best leverage competition to create value?

I believe that there is greater revenue potential to be found in competing on quality and product differentiation than by competing on volume alone. This is well-illustrated by the impact of the recent trade dispute with China, which hit sorghum especially hard. (Not to mention the current COVID-19 crisis.) Couple recent events with the eventuality that countries like Brazil and Argentina are a few infrastructure projects away from fully saturating global grain markets, and you might come to a similar conclusion.

## Sorghum: Profitability



The difference that marketing makes on farm profitability is also illustrated well by the above graph from the 2019 Testing Ag Performance Solutions (TAPS) Program at the University of Nebraska. The first six participants represented from left to right on this graph did not market their grain at all in 2019, and showed net losses as a result. Meanwhile, the four participants on the right hand side of the graph did market their sorghum, showing net profitability.

The time to reimagine how we approach consumer-minded and intentional marketing on our farms is now. Nebraska Sorghum is actively working to be a leader in this regard.

We have begun to seek out value-added processing opportunities for Nebraska Sorghum. Projects such as milling, aquaculture feed processing, and blow-in biodegradable insulation, to name a few, will allow pockets of sorghum producers to direct contract specialized hybrids to meet the specific demands of end-users. While no one project will lift all boats, by creating a diverse 'Sorghum Processing Corridor' across the state, we can augment the traditional commodity marketing model to potentially increase producer revenues while also creating economic opportunities in rural communities.

NGSB is actively building collaborations with state and local economic development professionals, entrepreneurs, and post-secondary education institutions...while also promoting Nebraska to industrial and culinary processors and creating consumer branding for sorghum. Through this a multi-pronged approach, we hope to create a robust, diverse, and prosperous environment in our state that will serve to sustain the next generation of sorghum producers.

If you have a sorghum-based product that you would like to see made in Nebraska, or know an entrepreneur that is looking for new opportunities, send us an email at: [sorghum.board@nebraska.gov](mailto:sorghum.board@nebraska.gov).