



**Comments from Kevin Kniebel, Chairman, Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission
Annual Report to the Legislature
January 25, 2022**

I want to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kevin Kniebel, and I am the Chairman of the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission, where I represent USDA Crop District 8 of Eastern Kansas. I farm near White City, south of Junction City, in Morris County.

Joining me from the Commission is Jesse McCurry, our Executive Director and Adam York, our Program Director. We have also brought on a new Collegiate Fellow, Parker Vulgamore, who is a junior at Kansas State University studying Agricultural Economics from Scott City.

To start, let me say sorghum in Kansas has had a very meaningful full year. We have seen a change in leadership at the Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission as Stephen Bigge of Stockton has passed the Chairman's gavel after six years of service. We thank Stephen for leading the Commission under times of extremely challenging budgetary cycles in recent years. However, today the sorghum industry commands an increasing footprint in our region as a result of sound investment, market demand, and profit opportunities.

The 2021 Kansas sorghum crop improved upon the previous year's momentum, producing 271 million bushels, a 14 percent increase over 2020. Kansas farmers harvested 3.35 million acres in 2021, up 20 percent from the prior year. The additional marginal acres committed to sorghum production and more intensive cropping practices caused sorghum producers to see a slight decrease in the average yield of 81 bushels per acre in 2021. Kansas remained the top sorghum producing state, however, by contributing 55 percent of the \$2.7 billion national crop, the most valuable sorghum crop in our nation's history.

Our Commission budget for FY22 is \$1,010,589. Kansas growers pay \$6.08 million into the United Sorghum Checkoff Program (66.84%) of the Checkoff's budget. There is no state checkoff for sorghum--it was voluntarily suspended to help create the United Sorghum Checkoff Program, funded by a 0.6 percent assessment on sorghum's market value at first point of sale. This national checkoff is non-refundable.



Kansas continues to have a great delegation steering the United Sorghum Checkoff Program as five Kansas sorghum farmers, all appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, serve as a plurality of its 13-member Board of Directors:

- Jeffry Zortman, Treasurer, Fowler
- Kendall Hodgson, Little River
- Shayne Suppes, Scott City
- Macey Mueller, Halstead
- Kim Baldwin, Inman

The Kansas Grain Sorghum Commission continues to have several primary investments in Kansas State University. K-State, which houses the Center for Sorghum Improvement, leverages key investments in sorghum with our state and federal partners and builds on component strengths through public research and collaboration with many private industry stakeholders.

I would also like to acknowledge the Legislature's continued investment in sorghum research as it has bolstered projects in the state related to the future of water in our State. Sorghum can be a tremendous resource in state water conservation and the State of Kansas has helped realize this farmer vision through Water Technology Farms, crop research, and continued leadership on Ogallala preservation.

Additionally, our market development program includes key resources in the U.S. Grains Council, an international cooperator to the United Sorghum Checkoff Program, as well as the International Grains Program Institute at K-State. Typically, our Commission would host international trade delegations prior to fall harvest, including dozens of buyers from our key markets, such as Mexico, Peru, Japan, the Philippines, and China. They would travel with our teams across the state for hands-on exposure. Our Commission continues to facilitate trade relations virtually but we are eager and stand ready to host foreign buyers in person again as soon as reasonably possible.

Domestically, the Commission also promotes ethanol, a clean-burning renewable fuel at the heart of many rural communities in Kansas. Sorghum as a feed grain can compete with corn and provide processors an interchangeable option to fuel vehicles and lower carbon emissions within our state and across our nation.



It has indeed been a very meaningful year for sorghum in Kansas. Kansas sorghum growers elected several new farmer-leaders to provide fresh perspective and help us move forward as a Commission. Jon Berning of Scott City, Brant Peterson of Johnson, and Evan Lesser of Palco all stepped forward in 2021 to begin serving the industry by representing the Western third of USDA Crop Districts in Kansas on the Commission. They join fellow Commissioners Nathan Larson of Riley, Mike Rosebrook of Beverly, Max Tjaden of Clearwater, Clark Bibb of Coldwater, and Kevin Harris of Abilene. We continue to see basis at extraordinary levels driven by energetic domestic and international demand. Private industry is advancing new sorghum technologies to deliver critical products, like over-the-top weed control, to farmers' fields. Collaborative partnerships yielding sorghum improvement research are paving the way for sustainable and profitable sorghum crops in Kansas for generations to come.

Included in our packet is an Annual Report document, our audit, and other informational materials. It is our pleasure to provide this report and we look forward to your questions.