





# “SORGHUM DOES IT BETTER”

With water availability a growing issue, sorghum is an alternative that farmers are increasingly considering.

Bruce Maunder, research adviser for the National Sorghum Producers, said sorghum has evolved into one of the most efficient crops for the Great Plains.

“Sorghum was introduced into the U.S. as a more dependable crop for the arid Great Plains,” Maunder said.

Sorghum is more dependable for many reasons. To name a few, it has a high drought tolerance, it has a large root system, it does not require as much water as other crops, it can be used as a food product for both humans and animals, and it can also be used as ethanol.

Lindsay Kennedy, the external affairs director for the National Sorghum Producers and former graduate of Texas Tech University, said sorghum is a good choice for farmers living in drought conditions.

“Sorghum is a naturally drought tolerant crop,” Kennedy said. “It doesn’t require as much water as other crops.”

Kennedy said with the lack of rainfall over the South Plains, it takes a durable crop to withstand such conditions.

“Last year we had a very limited amount of rainfall here in West Texas,” Kennedy said. “So as producers start looking for what kind of crops they are going to grow, water use and drought tolerance are going to be very important considerations.”

The environmental conditions of Texas and the abilities of sorghum to endure harsh climates and dry conditions, is why Texas is the second largest sorghum producing state in the country.

Glen Ritchie, a Texas Tech University and Texas AgriLife Research crop physiologist, said sorghum is also an efficient crop to grow in dry conditions because its roots grow deeper than other crops.

“Sorghum tends to have a very deep rooting system,” Ritchie said. “Therefore, it is able to extract water typically better than corn does.”

He said in general, a good yielding corn crop is going to use about 40-to-50 inches of irrigation in a year. A top yielding sorghum crop will use between 20-to-25 inches of irrigation a year. This makes sorghum a more marketable crop to grow in dry areas.

Because sorghum is a drought tolerant and water conservative crop, it is an effective source of food for livestock and humans. According to the National Sorghum Producers website, sorghum is essential to our world.

“The inherent tolerance of sorghum to marginal lands and environmental conditions, its versatility as a food and feed grain, and its ability to produce high yields ensure its important role in the lives of millions of people throughout the world,” the National Sorghum Producers reported.

In the livestock market, the website reported sorghum is used for a few different products. The grain it produces is used in the poultry, beef and

pork industries. Green chop, hay, silage, and pasture are produced from the stems and foliage of sorghum plants.

National Sorghum Producers also reported sorghum has been more commonly used in food products in the United States because of its use in gluten-free food products.

“Sorghum is an excellent substitute for wheat for those who cannot tolerate gluten,” the

website reported.

Bruce Maunder, research adviser for the National Sorghum Producers, said sorghum is used in other parts of the world such as Africa and Asia as a food crop.

“Sorghum is a good product for other parts of the world where food is scarce,” Maunder said. “It is used for a bread and/or porridge type food products and there are sweet sorghums which are used for syrup in these countries.”

Another use of this versatile crop is to make ethanol. The National Sorghum Producers said sorghum is more frequently being used by ethanol plants, because it produces the same amount of ethanol per bushel as comparable feedstock and uses one third less water.

Lindsay Kennedy from the National Sorghum Producers said sorghum, with its many favorable and versatile qualities for dry climates, is a smart crop to grow in the West Texas area.

“When you have a crop like sorghum that requires less irrigation and can do well in a dry-land situation, sorghum is a nice option for producers.”



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