



Photo Courtesy of Jennifer Blackburn at National Sorghum Producers

# The Hub of it All

Some people are referred to as passionate. Some are referred to as dedicated and hard-working. Some are referred to as simple and can relate to anybody. Some are referred to as unbelievably smart. Seldom is someone referred to as every one of these.

Chris Cogburn started out his young farming career near Happy, Texas, producing sorghum and wheat. Today, Chris serves as the manager of Sustainable Crop Insurance Services as well as the senior policy advisor for the National Sorghum Producers, being the hub that makes the sorghum wheel spin.

In 2004, while Chris was still producing sorghum on the Texas High Plains and holding a position on the National Sorghum Producers board of directors, he resigned from his position and two weeks later began classes at Texas Tech University.

Most people finish their bachelor's degree in three to four years; Chris finished his in a year and a half. Not only did he graduate in such a quick time, he graduated summa cum laude.

"It was tough," Cogburn said about earning his degree.

At one point he was taking 24 hours in one semester.

When Chris decided to resign, he spoke to Tim Lust, the chief executive officer of the National Sorghum Producers, who had known Chris for 30 years.

"He is one of the most intelligent people I have ever

known," Lust said.

Tim knew he wanted Chris to work for him when he caught wind of his resignation.

"I knew his intellect and how intelligent he was, so I jumped at the opportunity," Lust said. "He has been good at number sense since high school."

While he was getting his degree, Chris interned with the National Sorghum Producers from 2004 to 2005 and then began his full-time position in 2006.

John Duff is the strategic business director for NSP and has worked with Chris in several capacities since 2012. He says that "Chris has the rare ability not only to analyze issues of extreme complexity but to communicate the real world implications to the layman as well."

Since its founding in 2006, Sustainable Crop Insurance Services continues to grow, forcing Chris to focus on the insurance business full-time since June 2014, while still doing some advising for NSP. Chris and the rest of the team work with farmers from south Texas all the way to I-70 in Colorado.

"Our philosophy has been to go see the farmer wherever they are," Cogburn said.

Chris' travel distance adds up to an estimated 45,000 miles a year making new pick-up trucks a necessity instead of a luxury.

**"He is very  
tenacious and  
doesn't let go"**

“Since we started in 2006 we have signed papers in this office four times,” Cogburn said.

For some, traveling can be a nuisance, but not for Chris. His favorite part of the job is working with the farmers.

“It’s a good thing, and they are all super good people,” Cogburn said.

But like with any other job comes challenges as well. Chris said that the most challenging thing is keeping track of everything that’s changing. He constantly has to stay up to date with everything changing in the farm bills because that is how he best helps his clients with their crop insurance needs.

Since becoming the manager of Sustainable Crop Insurance Services, Chris has been busy helping change the sorghum industry. He developed the farm models that NSP used for decision making during the 2008 and 2014 farm bills and with the main component of the 2014 farm bill being crop insurance, his knowledge was highly sought after.

“He has a great understanding of farm policy, which has helped him on the insurance side,” Lust said. “He keeps going until he figures it out and gets it done.”

Working with insurance services and the farm bill content for NSP can take up most of his time, but Chris still finds time to work with other organizations as well. He has and still does some work with Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency and the Environmental Protection Agency; which he said can be challenging at times.

“Chris is unmatched as a thought leader and the example he sets for those around him is second to none,” said Duff.

When working with the FSA, Chris helped implement the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments (SURE) program into the 2008 Farm Bill. This program authorizes the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to provide agricultural disaster assistance to producers who suffered qualifying crop production losses, crop quality losses, or both due to disasters, weather, or other environmental conditions. His work with the RMA has included expanding the silage sorghum pilot to Texas, Oklahoma and New Mexico while also working to expand the annual forage program.

“I see a good future in agriculture,” Cogburn said. “We are going to keep producing food and fiber for people.”

Most people think with a schedule like this, how does he have time to do anything else? Well, along with being a professional in the sorghum world, he does all the data backing for a consulting company he and a friend started in Dumas, Texas, as well as balancing his family life.

Chris married his wife in 1996 after meeting her through the singles ads in the Farm Journal a year before.

At that time she lived in St. Joseph, Illinois, but then relocated to Texas after she married Chris. They now have two sons, one a senior in high school and the younger a junior. The older son plans to attend Oklahoma State University in the fall to pursue a degree in agricultural engineering.



Photo Courtesy of Sustainable Crop Insurance Services

Chris’ advice for young people wanting to move in the same direction as him is put together a network.

“Meet people and make contacts,” said Cogburn. “You never know where you’re going to meet people at, so take time to visit with them.”

He encourages students to get out of the classroom, and get involved in extra-curricular activities such as FFA and judging teams.

“The contacts you make now could be huge in six or seven years,” Cogburn said.

Chris may seem like a simple man to most on first impression, but his mind and work ethic are extraordinary. He has a passion for

everything he does.

“[Chris] is the hardest working person I know,” Lust said. “He is very tenacious and doesn’t let go.”



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