

**Testimony of Gregory Shelor before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry**

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Wichita, KS

Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Roberts and members of the Committee, I would like to thank you on behalf of Kansas grain sorghum farmers for the opportunity to share our views on discussions regarding farm bill programs.

I farm near Minneola in southwest Kansas, producing grain sorghum, wheat, corn and cattle. I am the president of the Kansas Grain Sorghum Producers Association and am a past president of the National Sorghum Producers.

Kansas is the nation's leading producer of grain sorghum. This year we are expected to produce 52 percent of the nation's sorghum crop. We normally produce between 40 and 50 percent of the U.S. grain sorghum crop. Sorghum is a feedgrain and is used as a feedstock for ethanol, for livestock feed and is exported to other countries. There is also a growing interest in food-grade sorghum, which is gluten-free and benefits those who choose a gluten-free diet, or cannot tolerate gluten in their diet due to Celiac Disease. Grain sorghum is a great benefit to many Kansas farmers because it can be grown in challenging conditions. It is naturally drought tolerant and does well even on marginal land.

We depend on farm programs for our day-to-day business decisions in Kansas. When I apply for a farm operating loan, my banker asks me two questions: Do you have crop insurance and what do you anticipate in direct payments? My ability to secure annual operating loans directly depends upon the stability of farm programs. Strong farm programs provide a certainty and stability that is vital for growers to be able to get operating capital from their banks. That operating capital bolsters local rural economies as well.

We appreciate your leadership in maintaining and strengthening farm programs. We understand agriculture will see cuts in budget negotiations, but those cuts should be equitable and proportionate to cuts to other programs.

Because most of the grain sorghum we raise is a dryland crop, risk management tools are vital to sorghum producers. Federal crop insurance and other risk management tools all have a place in ensuring a stable crop production system for the security of food, fiber and fuel.

In a state like Kansas, farmers are often faced with challenging conditions. Having a robust risk management system in place is vitally important to my farm. Direct payments also play a role on my farm, often filling in the gap between the level of risk management coverage I need compared to the level of coverage I can get. This is especially true in a year like this, where much of our state is suffering from varying levels of drought.

In Kansas, sorghum is used mainly for ethanol production and livestock. While most think of ethanol as a product made from corn, most Kansas ethanol plants use both feed grains to produce this renewable fuel. In fact, much of the ethanol produced in Kansas is made from grain sorghum. Having both grain sorghum and corn available allows ethanol plants more flexibility and better pricing opportunities. This ensures a strong and viable ethanol industry in our state, and also ensures a good value added market for sorghum producers.

Ethanol's co-product, distillers grains (DDGS) is a valued feed product for cattle feeders in Kansas. Cattle feeders like using sorghum wet or dry distillers grains in their feeding rations. The high-nutrient feed comes to them already processed, which is a valuable benefit to both feeders and sorghum farmers. It is also important for consumers to know that that one-third of total sorghum used to make ethanol re-enters the feed market as a distillers grain. Many feeders in Kansas actually prefer feeding distillers to feeding the whole grain because of ease of processing.

While I have focused on the use of grain sorghum for ethanol, I would like to mention the potential for the use of sweet sorghum and high biomass sorghum. As the potential for these biofuels crops advance, it will be important to develop risk management tools for these crops.

Grain sorghum is drought tolerant and well-suited to arid conditions we often experience in our state. As you know, many parts of the state are suffering a severe drought this year. While this drought will end, over the long term our issues with water will not. Sorghum will play an increasingly important role

in rotations in areas where water is in short supply. Water conservation is bound to be one of the prevailing issues of the future, and conservation will remain extremely important in the coming farm bill debate. Sorghum and other water smart crops will be an important part of the solution.

In closing, I would like to underline the importance of stable and viable farm programs, especially to minor crops like grain sorghum. Sorghum provides many benefits to conservation and crop rotations for our growers. Sorghum also plays an important role in a dependable feedgrain supply for our ethanol and livestock producers. However, as a crop that is used to make the most of difficult growing conditions, it is also uniquely exposed to risk. Well thought-out farm programs that address risks and the potential of grain sorghum will benefit our growers as well as our local, state and national economies.