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Sorghum trumps corn in efficiency, cost

Hereford, TX – Pound for pound corn just can't stack up to sorghum in production cost efficiencies, especially forage sorghum which trumps silage corn with significant savings to producers while delivering similar yields and nutritional value.

Today's crop and livestock producers are faced with high energy and production input costs, and shrinking water resources. High production costs coupled with low milk prices are turning many producers to highly productive and efficient forage sorghums.

“There are numerous advantages to forage sorghum over corn that producers are getting excited about,” says Ricky Rice, Advanta US forage specialist and sales manager. “Forage sorghums deliver efficiencies that are reflected in lower production costs, including high water use efficiency, lower fertility requirements, superior forage nutritional quality with BMR 6 types, unsurpassed regrowth ability and excellent, high-yielding silage.”

Savings start up-front with forage sorghum, according to Rice. Seed costs are in the neighborhood of \$10 per acre compared to corn in the \$100 per acre range, including traits. Fertility costs are as much as 30 percent lower for forage sorghum versus corn, with sorghum requiring much less nitrogen fertilizer than corn. Because worldwide demand for nitrogen fertilizer continues to increase, so will nitrogen costs. As fertilizer nitrogen prices rise, the benefits of forage sorghum over corn grow even larger.

Perhaps the largest advantage of forage sorghum is its unsurpassed water use efficiency. Alfalfa and corn don't come close to meeting sorghum's ability to produce under harsh conditions. Because sorghum is such a hardy, drought tolerant plant, it requires 30 percent to 50 percent less water than corn. For irrigated producers, pumping 30 percent to 50 percent less water for a similar yield greatly reduces the cost per acre of the forage produced. On the flipside, sorghum is much more water-use efficient, which means it produces twice the biomass of corn on the same amount of water. Where water conservation is critical, forage sorghum would be a preferred crop by conserving precious water supplies for future use.

An economic study conducted in Texas showed irrigated corn silage production costs of over \$408 per acre compared to irrigated forage sorghum at \$286 per acre. The energy cost for irrigating corn was \$153 per acre while sorghum was only \$90 per acre. Producer adoption of a forage sorghum-based silage system could save over 400,000 acre inches annually.

In California, the largest dairy production state, producers are also seeing the benefits of forage sorghum. According to California Cooperative Extension budgets, the total production input cost for corn silage in the San Joaquin Valley is \$751 per acre compared to forage sorghum at \$380 per acre. According to the budget, the fertilizer cost savings alone for sorghum was over \$250 per acre; and the irrigation cost for corn was an additional \$46 per acre over sorghum.

“Whether it's an irrigated or dryland farming operation, sorghum's adaptive nature, high production efficiency, and diverse use make it a valuable tool and the best choice for forage producers demanding high quality feed stocks,” sums up Rice.

Advanta US offers unique germplasm for high quality forage sorghums, sudangrasses, hybrid grain sorghums, sorghums for biofuels and sunflowers. For more information on Advanta US and its products, go to: www.advantaus.com.

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