



Press Release

Brian Ballou, of Wilsonville, NE, a producer in the Lower Republican Natural Resources District earned the top award for the most profitable sorghum farm in the 2018 UNL-TAPS (University of Nebraska Lincoln Testing Ag Performance Solutions) program.

The UNL-TAPS program is an interactive farm management competition bringing together scientists, producers, industry professionals, students and more to promote efficiency and profitability. The competition, developed by University of Nebraska research and extension specialists and educators, just completed its second year and is preparing to begin its third year. Rather than a typical learning environment, participants interact in the real life farm management competitions administered in North Platte.

In 2018 the competition expanded from the pilot sprinkler irrigated corn program to also include a sprinkler irrigated sorghum competition. The corn contest had 20 participating teams and the sorghum contest had 8 teams with participants from Nebraska and Kansas representing 12 Nebraska Natural Resource Districts (NRDs) and 2 Kansas Groundwater Management Districts. Expanding the program allowed for the inclusion of new and returning producer teams, as well as non-producer teams.

Each team is randomly assigned a set of three experiment sized plots, totaling about one half of an acre. The yields and costs from each “farm” are amplified to represent 3,000 harvested acres for the corn competition and 1,000 harvested acres for the sorghum competition, which is more representative of a modern farm size. Participants have control over six parameters: irrigation management, nitrogen management, hybrid selection, seeding rate, grain marketing and crop insurance.

The 2018 competition concluded in December with the awards banquet where the results were presented for the top “farms” in three categories including greatest grain yield, highest input use efficiency and the highest award of most profitable farm.

Ballou farms dryland sorghum on his own operation so growing irrigated sorghum was a new experience, one with “a huge learning curve,” he admitted. Ballou said he kept his approach in the competition “pretty straightforward,” trying to keep the inputs low and efficiency high.

The 2019 program will kick off in March and will feature the sprinkler irrigated corn and sorghum contests, as well as a new subsurface drip irrigation (SDI) corn competition. Visit our website, taps.unl.edu for the full 2018 report, to subscribe to our newsletter, or follow UNL-TAPS on Twitter. For more information on participating in the competition, or sponsoring the event please contact Krystle Rhoades at krystle.rhoades@unl.edu.

Photo Caption: Brent Bean (L) of the United Sorghum Checkoff presents the award for most profitable

sorghum farm to Brian Ballou of Wilsonville.