

# Nebraska Sorghum



## Special Report: Nebraska Trade Delegation to The United Arab Emirates and

## The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

[www.nebraskasorghum.org](http://www.nebraskasorghum.org)

Issue 10



## Introduction:



*On a brisk February morning, delegates of an official trade mission to the MENA Region assembled at Eppley Airfield in Omaha, Nebraska. The delegation was led by Nebraska Secretary of State, Robert Evnen, and was the first official trade delegation to the region since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The group was comprised of 30 Nebraska citizens representing the agriculture, technology, academia, private industry, manufacturing, and legal sectors.*

*While the delegation consisted exclusively of current Nebraska citizens. Not all delegates were native Nebraskans. Much like the state which was being represented, this group was surprisingly (to one unfamiliar with Nebraska's demographics) diverse. Countries of origin included: Afghanistan, Bulgaria, Argentina, Togo, Kuwait, Kenya, Lebanon, Scotland, and of course, the United States of America.*

*The countries visited boasted similar diversity. For example, the city of Dubai alone in the United Arab Emirates lists 60% of it's population as being from India and Southwest Asia. Jordan has doubled in population in ten years as a result of being a place of refuge to peoples displaced by conflict in neighboring states.*

*Other themes were found to be in common. Shared interests in water and soil conservation, climate change mitigation, food security, investment and trade, technology and manufacturing, and for academic exchange punctuated each meeting. The outcomes explored by Nebraska Sorghum, and the Nebraska Delegation, in the United Arab Emirates and Jordan for mutually-beneficial opportunities are both immediate and long-term.*

*This report will provide you, a stakeholder and supporter of Nebraska Sorghum, with a high-level review of the Sorghum Army's meetings in the UAE and Jordan, potentials for markets development in the region, and potentials for collaboration within the public and private sectors in each nation.*

# Upcoming Events, Resources, and Table of Contents

## Calendar of Events

March 9- 12:

- 2022 Commodity Classic  
(New Orleans)

March 25:

- Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board Goal  
Setting-Meeting  
(Grand Island)

March 25:

- Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board and  
Nebraska Sorghum Producers  
Association Quarterly Meetings  
(Grand Island)

March 25:

- Annual Sorghum Appreciation  
Banquet  
(Ramada Midtown, Grand Island)

## Resources

[U.S. Drought Monitor](#)

[KSU Grain Basis Maps](#)

[UNL Crop Budget  
Reports](#)

Haven't gotten your Sorghum Army gear yet?  
Click here to order hats, t-shirts, sweatshirts and polos!

[The Sorghum  
Army Outpost](#)

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# Nebraska Sorghum Goals in the United Arab Emirates and The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

*At the heart of any trade mission is the desire to advocate and facilitate exports to new purchasers. However, due to sorghum's potential positive impacts on climate, water and soil health, human and animal health, and economic disparity in developed and developing regions, the goals of Nebraska Sorghum on this trade mission were a bit more complex. Below is a brief description of our top priorities.*

## **1) Facilitating Trade:**

- Much of the MENA Region is dependent upon agricultural trade due to natural limits of sustainable environmental usage.
- The UAE is the largest importer of US Agricultural goods in the region.
- The UAE is home to significantly large populations of expatriates whose native diets includes sorghum as a staple. However, those populations currently do not have access to sorghum. This is a market opportunity.
- Jordan is a close ally of the US in the region. While much of the agricultural imports to Jordan come from Ukraine, Russia, and Romania through the Black Sea, turmoil in the region may justify increased shipping costs from more distant ports in the US.
- The Jordanian government has expressed that importation of sorghum for sheep feed is a high priority. Additionally, the government is operating under a mandate to become food secure in the near future.
- Jordan was the first country in the region to sign a Free trade Agreement (FTA) with the USA (twenty years ago). There is no FTA between the UAE and the USA at present.



# Nebraska Sorghum Goals in the United Arab Emirates and The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

## **2) Promoting Climate Water, and Soil Health:**

- Encouraging adoption of sorghum as a rotational crop. The MENA Region is at the forefront of rainfall, groundwater, and surface water scarcity.
- Introducing sorghum as a rotational option will necessarily decrease water usage. The plant uses half of the water of peer crops, and is drought tolerant.
- Including sorghum in local rotations will increase productivity of other crops through renewal of biomass in the soil. Including sorghum in rotations will also decrease the effects of climate change, as the crop has been shown to more efficiently sequester carbon in the soil.

## **3) Bettering Human and Animal Health**

- Obesity and Diabetes are endemic to the MENA Region due to a high reliance on rice in local diets. Sorghum can mitigate these ailments as a substitute for rice. The uses of sorghum and rice are similar in recipes, but sorghum's naturally lower glycemic content and higher nutrient content give it an advantage in regard to human dietary benefits.
- Including sorghum in animal diets, in particular for finishing cattle and sheep, will decrease water demands created by local production of alternative crops.

## **4) Tackling Economic Disparity amongst Small-Holder Farmers**

- Markets for sorghum are growing worldwide. Many sorghum farmers adjacent to the MENA Region do not have access to international markets, because the demand is still nascent in the area.
- Developing demand locally will allow access to high-value markets for small-holder farmers in East Africa and India, thus helping to lift many in the developing world to a higher economic prosperity.



# Meetings Summary: The United Arab Emirates

## 1) Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce

- Nebraska Panel Discussions

- One-on-One Connections:

Omar Salih Wahbi - Delegations Specialist, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce

Suroor Hesham Sawan - Internal Affairs Specialist, Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce

Ali Alshamsi - CEO Conrad Hotel

Augusto Castellanos Cardenas - International Relations, Abu Dhabi Investment Office

Hind Al Youha - Investment and Talent Director, UAE Ministry of Economy

## 2) ADQ Holdings and Investments

- Discussion on Sustainability and Food Security

Gil Adotevi - Executive Director, Portfolio Management

Silal Food Technology Executive Team

## 3) Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure

- Roundtable Discussion on Water, Energy, and Agriculture

Abdullah Bin Salem Al Wahshi - Chairman, Emirates Council for Work Relation

Development

## 4) Kanoo Group

- Discussion on the Potential for Sorghum in the Region

Mahmood Ahmad Mian - Head of Business Development

## 5) Sharjah Chamber of Commerce

- Formal Discussion of Shared Interests and Dinner

- One-on-One Connections

Abdelaziz Mohamed Humaid Shattaf - Assistant Director General, Sharjah Chamber

Abdullah Al-Jawder - CEO, U.A. Enterprises

Elias Sejean - Manager Business Development, IFFCO



Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce



Sharjah Chamber of Commerce



Blum on an Ag Panel at the Dubai Chamber

# Meetings Summary: The United Arab Emirates

## 6) Gulfood Ribbon Cutting and Meetings

(Largest Annual Food Show in the MENA Region)

- One-on-One Meetings
- Jessline Carvalho - Business Development, Sun Impex
- Laura Amores - Export Manager, Torres Y Ribelles
- Bilal Shahbaz - Export Manager, Doughstory
- Megha Verma - AGM, Tradologie
- Ziv Dotan - UK Branch Manager, Mikshar Import-Export Agency
- Julia Bezverkhnia - Export Manager, Agrovita
- Jeff Sutton - CEO, Healthy Flour
- Asad Khan - CEO, ABC Global
- Gerard Chin-A-Kwie - Director, American Food Service Inc.
- Thomas Peace - International Sales, Preferred Popcorn

## 7) Dinner with USDA FAS Staff

## 8) Dubai Chamber of Commerce

- Nebraska Panel Discussions
- One-on-One Connections
- Kamlesh Thakur - Chairman, PrimeInvestrade Limited
- Sarfraz Dairkee - General Manager, M.A.H.Y. Khoory and Co.

## 9) Meeting with Minister Dr. Thani Ahmed Al Zeyoudi and Staff, Ministry of Economy

## 10) Meeting with Ministry of Climate Change and Environment

## 11) Taste of Nebraska Event



Dr. Al Zeyoudi and Nebraska Secretary of State Robert Evnen



Nebraska Sorghum Executive Director, Nate Blum at Gulfood

# Key Notes from The United Arab Emirates

- 60% or more of the population in Dubai is from East Africa or Southwest ASia. These are places where sorghum is a staple of local diets. Presently there are no products available to this market in The UAE.
- The UAE (and many of the GCC Countries) are facing an epidemic of obesity and diabetes due to a heavy reliance on rice in diets. Sorghum can be a strong alternative as a rice replacement to mitigate this epidemic
- Consumer awareness and education of sorghum must be developed in order to expand the industry in the MENA/GCC Region.
- Water and Resource management are key priorities for the UAE government.
- Tradologie is a company Nebraska farmers should be looking into. This is a tech company which has an app platform that connects producers directly with buyers. The platform allows for direct price negotiations and contracting. More info can be found at: [www.tradologie.com](http://www.tradologie.com)



Blum at the Burj Khalifa



View from the Top of the Burj Khalifa, Highlighting the Ecologically Precarious Nature of the Region

# Meetings Summary: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan



Sunrise over Amman (Photo Courtesy of Mr. Angel Velitchkov)

1) Nebraska Agricultural Delegation and National Center for Agricultural Research  
- Meeting with Dr. Nizar Haddad and Team

2) Select Nebraska Delegation Meeting and Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply  
- Minister Yousef Mahmoud Al-Shamali  
- Minister of Industry, Trade, and Supply  
- Senator Nael Raja Al-Kabariti - Chair Jordan Chamber of Commerce

- Nebraska Delegation Meeting with the Jordanian Royal Court

3) Limited Nebraska Delegation Meeting with the Ministry of Irrigation and Water  
- Eng. Bashar Batineh - Secretary General, Ministry of Irrigation and Water Authority

4) Limited Delegation Meeting with Jordan Silos and Supply General Company  
- Eng. Emad A. Al. Tarawneh - General Manager, Jordan Silos and Supply General

4) Taste of Nebraska Event  
- One-on-One Connections  
- Aseel Al-Mkhaimer - Communications Officer, The Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development  
- Yasser Khalaf - Marketing Director, Frozen Food House  
- Dr. Tareq Tamimi - Marketing Director, Tourmaline Marketing and Investment Company  
- Rustom Abuargub - Business Development, Manaseer



Delegation Meeting at the Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Supply



The Small Business Incubator at the National Center for Agricultural Research



The Nebraska Delegation Meets with the Royal Jordanian Court

# Meetings Summary: The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

1) Importation of sorghum for sheep feeding is a top priority expressed by the Jordanian government. Connections between Embassy staff, Jordanian Importers, and U.S. Exporters have been established

2) As in the UAE, obesity and diabetes are epidemic. Inclusion of sorghum in the local diet as an alternative/replacement for rice makes sense, and can be achieved through markets development efforts.

3) Water and food security are significant priorities in Jordan.

- The population of Jordan has doubled in ten years due to peoples seeking refuge from Syria, Iraq, and Palestine.
- Annual rainfall for the past three years has decreased to 60% of average.
- The Dead Sea has declined by fifty feet or more in five years.
- Currently, wells are being drilled 4,000 feet deep to access dwindling aquifer reserves.

4) There is an opportunity to teach local farmers to grow sorghum as a food source given the decreased need for water in comparison with crops being presently grown.

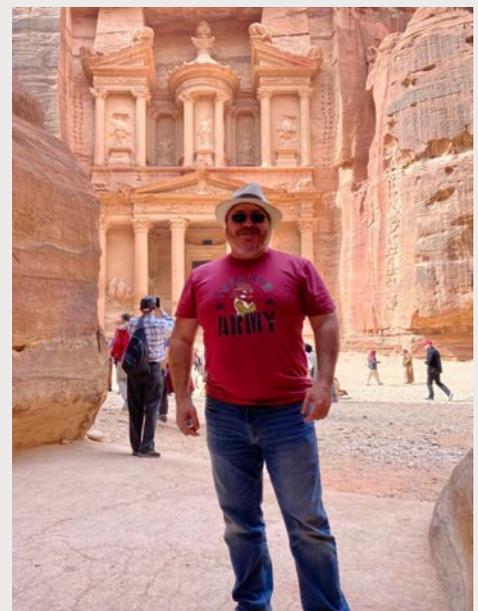
5) Discussions took place to host a delegation of water officials and influential famers to Nebraska later in 2022 to exchange best practices for water and resource management.

6) The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a close ally in the region. Much of the infrastructure is funded through USAID and diplomatic dollars. This is a sound investment given the stability the Kingdom provides to the region.



Left: Illustration of water decline in the Dead Sea: The water level reached the edge of the top wall just five years ago.

Right: Blum and the Nebraska Delegation visit the ancient Nabatean trading city of Petra



# Message from the Director: Bridging the Cultural Divide



At the time of this writing, Eastern Europe is at war. American politics and the polarity of the American electorate is supercharged. There are immigration crises at our southern border, and uncertainties in much of the world...including the Middle East.

Many Americans may be tempted to shrink into the policies of Isolationism. To "worry about our own problems" and let the "rest of the world" worry about theirs. This notion represents an unattainable myth.

The first 21 years of the 21st Century have seen the continued, and expediated, march toward international connectedness. Actions in one part of the world necessarily influence actions across the globe. We don't have to "like" it. But, the fact that this is true cannot be denied.

We rightly look to national leaders to provide guidance and steady hands in world affairs on the state level. At the same time, we may neglect the interpersonal relationships which can influence state policies. This level, the one-on-one conversations that happen between individuals and interagency representatives, is underestimated at times. It is true that such conversations begin small, but they can quickly manifest into international course-changing policy.

Take for example a common conversation that I experienced in the MENA Region: Often when inviting individuals to visit Nebraska, the invitation was met with trepidation. People stated that they would love to visit Washington D.C. or New York, but expressed serious concern with visiting the U.S. Midwest. This caught me off guard.

It turns out that there is as much interpersonal misinformation about the US Midwest among residents of the Middle East as there is about the Middle East amongst residents of the Midwest. A few examples of this include our notion that women are uniformly subjugated in Arabic culture. The opposite was to be witnessed as our delegation met with women holding leadership positions across the UAE. Prior to meeting the delegation, our Middle-Eastern counterparts were under the impression that the American Midwest was a homogenous conglomeration of European descendants who dislike people of different ethnicities. The opposite was witnessed when they realized that our Nebraska delegation consisted of foreign nationals from eight different countries from Africa, Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe...all of whom have found success in Nebraska.

# Director's Report: Bridging the Cultural Divide

Why does this matter? It matters because it ought to serve as a reminder that when we lay aside our ideas of what someone who is different from us may be, and instead listen to how they describe themselves, real relationships can begin to form. We may not always agree. Our value may not align. Yet, mutual respect is found in listening, and respect is the foundation for relationships.

Those relationships grow into business deals. I've been asked how much sorghum I sold during our trade mission. The reality is that I did not go to sell sorghum. I went to build relationships that will allow for unforeseen and mutually beneficial interpersonal and interorganizational relationship...that will ALSO result in sales of sorghum.

These relationships also "trickle up". By genuinely showing concern and interest with individuals on a personal level, it changes the opinions and uninformed tropes in each person. As a consequence, the parties involved share their experience with those around them. Soon, one conversation is related to another person and another person and another person...until cultural preconceptions are corrected by fact in a much larger population.

The sum of that which we have in common with our Arab brothers and sisters is greater than the parts which divide us. Yes. Culture is different. For many Americans and Arabs, religions are different. Our geopolitical outlook on the globe is different. Our concerns for peace, prosperity, sustainability, health, and hope for the future are the same. It is the similarities that matter most.

If you know me, you've heard me say this before. People are people wherever you go. We all want safety, security, healthy food, clean water, and for our children to do better for themselves than we have. The facade of culture may appear different. The unique spices of place and circumstance may alter the flavor...but the recipe remains the same.

At Nebraska Sorghum, we do not "sell sorghum". We build relationships. We foster markets. We lift up farmers at home by creating high value markets in North America, and in regions around the world by facilitating access to high value markets proximate to their farms. Most importantly, we bridge the cultural divide because we believe in the innate common denominator of humanity. No matter how divided our world may seem.

Nate Blum



Executive Director  
Nebraska Sorghum

# THE GRAIN THAT GIVES

As rich in nutrition as it is good for the Earth, sorghum sustains by offering big benefits for our health, water, wildlife and our world.



**SORGHUM-SAVVY**  
Learn more when you visit  
[sorghumcheckoff.com](http://sorghumcheckoff.com)

## SORGHUM HELPS FIGHT HUNGER



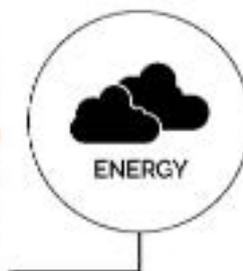
**Sorghum benefits the globe from the ground up:**

- Builds soil health by retaining more nutrients
- Sips and saves water up to 227%<sup>1</sup> better than comparable crops
- Reduces the need for pesticides and insecticides
- Protects against soil erosion from harsh winter winds
- Removes harmful carbon from the atmosphere by storing it underground



**Sorghum is an ancient grain that provides today's nourishment:**

- Cooked whole grain sorghum is an excellent source of protein and fiber
- More antioxidants than blueberries and pomegranates
- Naturally gluten free



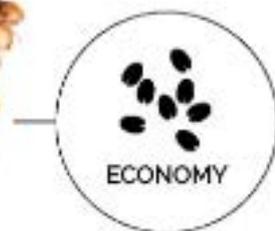
**Sorghum ensures the future of fuel:**

- Clean-burning ethanol for better air quality
- Earth-friendly renewable resource from marginal land
- Boosts energy security by helping to import less petroleum
- Less expensive than other plant-based ethanol sources



**Sorghum helps fauna flourish:**

- Habitat protects and increases wild life populations
- Preferred food choices for deer, pheasants and quail



**Sorghum makes financial sense for farmers:**

- Improved yields of rotated crops
- Lower seed and other input costs
- Reduced economic risk
- 74% of sorghum acres are farmed with conservation methods<sup>2</sup>

A single cup of cooked whole grain sorghum packs 14.8 grams of protein<sup>3</sup>, plus it's a high energy grain and an excellent source of 12 vitamins and minerals. No wonder the United States relies on it for food assistance efforts around the world.

**SORGHUM** THE SMART CHOICE