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Guar company expanding

A little bean can go a long way for one rapidly-expanding local company.

West Texas Guar is one of only a few of its kind on the globe. The facility, located at 807 N. Fifth St., is the only plant on the continent with guar bean-splitting services - the only others with that service are in India and Pakistan - and one of only five in the U.S. that manufactures guar powder.

"Today, we're the only company in the world that starts at the seed and ends at the final product of a guar bean," said Chief Operations Officer Klint Forbes.

The plant's splitting and de-hoing facility was recently upgraded with structural improvements west of the train tracks in the former home of Four Star Grain. Management felt that expanding their company was the necessary next step amid successful operations.

"With the increased demand, this has allowed for structural improvements," said CEO Wade Cowan.

Management have increased their payroll to 17 full-time employees, and are planning an expansion of the company into Australia. Moving into the Land



Chief Operations Officer Klint Forbes demonstrates how the legume is processed.

Down Under gives them a better production balance and a more consistent market, they said.

"This allows us two crops a year," Forbes said. "This helps the U.S. grower and the Australian grower by working together to supply consistently into a growing market."

Guar is a legume that grows comparably well in desert environments, which

gives it a great home in West Texas. It does need some rain, but not as much as many other types of crops. It is also grown in Arkansas, Oklahoma, California, Arizona and Mexico.

"We plant guar on ground that people say is no good," Forbes said. "Guar is a very hardy plant. It is an extremely water-efficient plant."

The legume is used in

more than 1,000 food products, as well as in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, pet food, kitty litter and products related to hydraulic fracturing and the mining industry. Not surprisingly, its consumer demand correlates with that from the oil industry.

"With the current demand from the oil and gas industry, it has increased the value of guar and the sustainability of U.S. guar," Forbes said.

While currently harvesting, producers anticipate finishing the season with more pounds of guar than ever before.

"This will be a record for our county, and one of the largest crops in the history of the U.S.," Cowan said.

And hopefully, many more will follow.

"We have made a considerable investment in Brownfield the last couple years, and we found ourselves working through many challenges," Forbes said. "The city of Brownfield has been very helpful in overcoming some of those challenges as a growing business through the many departments we deal with. The citizens of Brownfield have been very supportive as well."

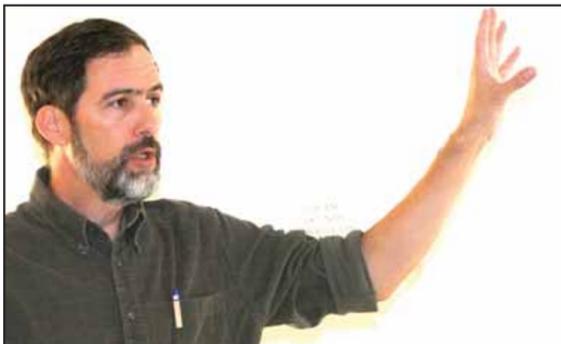
Farmers learn sorghum tips

by JOSIE MUSICO
Staff Writer

Sorghum can be far more than a profitable cover crop if managed properly, a group of producers learned Monday.

The Texas Grain Sorghum Producers and the United Sorghum Checkoff Program presented a noon workshop instructing farmers how to do just that.

Sorghum Checkoff Crop Improvement Director Justin Weinheimer, Ph.D., one of four guest speakers in the program, encouraged a group of about 60 people at the Coleman Park Party House to responsibly monitor their sorghum crops.



Texas AgriLife agronomist Calvin Trostle, Ph.D., describes some sorghum-growing tips. Trostle was one of four speakers at a sorghum workshop at noon Monday at the Coleman Park Party House.

"It's going to take some management, and it's going to take some effort," he said. "...The best way to get good crop insurance is good farming practices."

Like with other types of crops, a major issue is insufficient water. And although some farmers might link the shortage to the recent West Texas drought, Weinheimer presented data indicating water levels had actually been steadily declining the past 40 years.

"We're seeing some really high depletion rates across the South Plains," he said. "We're really coming down to a crucial time in irrigation ... It's not just a local thing - it's much broader than that."

AgriLife Extension Service agronomist Calvin Trostle, Ph.D., another speaker, explained that methods for sorghum production could vary depending on whether it was used as a primary crop or a cover crop to fill field space between cotton seasons. It could also be a great alternative for farmers experiencing problems with their cotton such as nematodes or verticillium wilt.

Trostle recommended planting one pound of sorghum seeds for every 1,000 pounds of anticipated yield, and waiting until at least two weeks after the last frost date to begin planting, particularly if soil temperatures are up. Some farmers who used sorghum as a cover crop made the mistake of eagerly planting too soon, he said.

"People are interested in these early planting dates so they can get it in and get it out," he said. "...If you're having doubts, maybe you should wait. It's not worth sickly seedlings."

The ideal number of seeds to plant can also vary depending on the soil moisture and type of seeds. He recommended a modest-low rate of about 30-35,000 seeds per acre on dryland, and up to 110,000 on fully irrigated fields.

He listed the phases of grain sorghum development, from emergence to growing point development to flowering and physiological maturity.

The program's other two presentations were "Marketing Your Sorghum" by Florentino Lopez of Sorghum Checkoff and "Legislative Update" by Wayne Cleveland of the Texas Grain Sorghum Association.

Lopez described how the increase in world population contributed to the price of sorghum, particularly through a higher demand for meat.

"As that number continues to increase, you see the economic impact," he said. "Supply has basically outpaced production."

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