

New Crop Opportunities Newsletter

Winter 2009

New sweet sorghum hybrid seed available to growers

Seed of a new sweet sorghum hybrid released by the University of Kentucky is now being offered for sale.

The hybrid, KN-Morris, is the first ever sweet sorghum male-sterile hybrid. KN-Morris yields 25 percent more juice than other varieties, resulting in more syrup. It also has better standability and experiences less lodging.

KN-Morris was developed through a joint effort by researchers at the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture and the USDA's Agricultural Research Service program at the University of Nebraska. Funded by the New Crop Opportunities Center, UK researchers tested hybrids and selected KN-Morris as the best performer. Following a seed increase in 2008 by the Kentucky Foundation Seed Project, certified seed is being offered for sale for the 2009 growing season.

Plant and Soil Sciences Professor Todd Pfeiffer is the principal investigator on the New Crop Opportunities sweet sorghum project. The new hybrid was named for Morris Bitzer, co-principal investigator on the project. The name was selected to honor Bitzer for his contributions to the National Sweet Sorghum Producers and Processors Association and the Kentucky Sweet Sorghum Association.

Kentucky is among eight states in the Southeast and Midwest responsible for about 90 percent of the sorghum syrup produced in



the United States. The average yield for sweet sorghum is 175 gallons per acre, but yields can be as high as 200 to 300 gallons per acre. With sorghum syrup selling for \$20 to \$25 per gallon, higher yields can bring net profits of more than \$2,000 per acre.

For more information on buying seed from the Kentucky Foundation Seed Project, go to <http://www.ca.uky.edu/PSS/index.php?p=703>.

New Crops agent training set

The New Crop Opportunities Center will offer an in-service training, Organic Production Systems and Irrigation Systems, for Extension agents on Thursday, June 18th at the Horticulture Research Farm in Lexington. Topics will include mixed vegetable production systems, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), apple production, berry production, cultivation, irrigation, and disease and insect control. The training will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Eastern time. Lunch will be provided.

This training will offer agents the opportunity to get a close look at the certified organic section of the research farm, as well as the CSA operated for students, staff, and faculty by the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture Sustainable Agriculture Program. For more information,

contact Christy Cassady at cgcass0@uky.edu or (859) 257-1477, Mark Williams at mawillia@uky.edu, or Tim Coolong at timcoolong@uky.edu.

MarketMaker gets a makeover

From Illinois Ag Connection

Since 2003, the University of Illinois MarketMaker Web site has been helping connect farmers and producers to markets. The Web site, which began as a free online database of Illinois businesses, has recently received a makeover.

There are currently 10 states whose Web sites are up and running: Illinois, Iowa, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New York, Kentucky, Ohio, Mississippi, and Georgia. Colorado, Washington, D.C. and South Carolina have Web sites that are under construction.

The national portal can be found at <http://national.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>. The Kentucky site can be accessed at <http://ky.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/>.

“MarketMaker has grown exponentially since it was first kicked off in Illinois 5 years ago,” said Darlene Knipe, Marketing Specialist for the University of Illinois and one of the founders of the MarketMaker program. “As more and more states went live it became apparent that our system could not accommodate the level of site activity we were experiencing.”

The MarketMaker site has one of the largest collections of searchable food industry-related data in the country. The information is categorized by buyers, sellers, location and other demographic information. Knipe said that it’s more than just an online directory, because it features a mapping capability, allowing easy location of nearby food sources. The site provides a quick, yet simple method of searching for food-related products in detail, looking for attributes such as humanely raised or organically grown and product forms such as fresh or frozen.

Knipe said that MarketMaker is now not only faster, but the stage has been set for a suite of new features and improvements. One new addition to the Web site is the MarketMaker Blog, where

a team of MarketMaker bloggers will share their insights and expertise. And the Buyers Sellers Forum will now include a calendar of product availability. Businesses who are registered on the site will also be able to track how many users have viewed their information and for what reason.

Future plans for the site include increasing the amount of educational material available. “We have long known the value of MarketMaker’s searchable directory of farmers and food related businesses. It is our strong suit,” Knipe said. “But MarketMaker can also be a powerful tool for information and education.”

Knipe said that MarketMaker’s national network of partners includes 14 Land Grant Universities, including the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center (AgMRC) at Iowa State University.

“We have a lot of expertise in areas of food and agriculture on the National Food MarketMaker team,” Knipe said. “We plan to showcase that.”

There is no charge associated with having a business listed on the site. To register in Kentucky, go to <http://register.marketmaker.uiuc.edu/index.php?state=21>. Additional information about MarketMaker is available through a New Crop Opportunities Center marketing profile available at <http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/marketing/marketmaker.pdf>.

New crop profiles available

Several new crop profiles are available on the New Crop Opportunities Center Web site. They include elderberry, persimmon, high tunnel tomatoes, high tunnel leafy greens and herbs, gourmet and medicinal mushrooms, organic sweet corn, tomatillo, and a three-part series of profiles on wildcrafting non-timber forest products. Crop profiles can be found online at <http://www.uky.edu/ag/newcrops/intro.html>.

Center to receive more funding

The New Crop Opportunities Center will receive another round of funding from the USDA in 2009.

The Center is currently accepting grant proposals from researchers within the College of Agriculture. Deadline for those proposals is March 6th. We are once again anticipating proposals involving research on a variety of horticulture and specialty grains crops.

2007 Ag Census available

The 2007 Census of Agriculture counted 85,260 farms in Kentucky. Average farm size increased from 160 acres in 2002 to 164 acres in 2007. While the census farms reported sales of agricultural products at \$4.82 billion dollars, an average of \$56,586 per farm, it also showed that 67 percent of all Kentucky farms sold less than \$10,000 worth of agricultural products, the same as 2002. Only 7 percent of all farms in Kentucky accounted for 83 percent of total farm sales of agricultural products.

The 8,113 tobacco farms in Kentucky in 2007 represent a decline of 72 percent since 2002. Tobacco acres harvested decreased 21 percent from 2002.

A number of Kentucky growers have added

vegetable production to their enterprises since 2002. In 2007, 2,098 farms sold \$20,937,000 worth of vegetables, up from 1,474 farms and \$17,757,000 in 2002. The number of farms growing grapes jumped from 296 in 2002 to 385 in 2007. Grape acreage increased from 489 to 618 acres.

The census also indicated that 193 farms were using 9,280 acres for organic production. The total amount of organic product sales in the state was \$2,360,000 in 2007. Organic production is on the rise in Kentucky, as 7,044 acres on 229 farms are being converted to organic.

Upcoming events

June 18 - In-service training, Organic Production Systems and Irrigation Systems, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. (Eastern time), Horticulture Research Farm, Emmert Farm Lane, Lexington.

July 11-14 - Ohio Florists' Association Short Course, Greater Columbus Convention Center, 400 N High St., Columbus, Ohio. For more information, go to <http://www.ofa.org/shortcourseinfo.aspx>.