

KREMLIN “It is common to find sesame seed buns in most food stores.

What is uncommon is that those sesame seeds are grown in only two locations

in the U.S. “Oklahoma and Texas. Oklahomans have been harvesting sesame seeds for

more than 20 years. Even current Oklahoma Secretary of Agriculture Jim Reese harvested sesame

seed in 1996. “Back when we had bad dust storms, I was planting sesame

crops,” said Reese. “The appeal was they have a deep root system and do

well in hot dry weather.” But as soon as the dry spell was over,

Reese returned to planting wheat. Sesame is used in foods and for sesame oil,

which is common in cooking and alternative medicine. Today’s ongoing drought and the current

crash of the wheat market have state farmers trying alternative cash crops. That includes

sesame thanks to grain elevator owners like Brady Sidwell getting information out about the

crop. Sidwell stands inside his office at Enterprise Grain Co. as a tractor-trailer truck

with a load of sesame drives up onto the scales to be weighed before

dumping the crop in his elevator in Kremlin. A native of nearby Goltry, Sidwell

has owned the grain elevator since May 2016 and has been working tirelessly to

educate local growers about sesame through phone calls, radio and Facebook. According to Austin,

Texas-based Sesaco, the firm that contracts growers for their sesame crop, Sidwell’s grain elevator

is one of six delivery points in northwest Oklahoma. “If people don’t have a

place to deliver a crop to, it’s less relevant,” says Sidwell as he greets

farmers coming into the weigh station by his office. Sidwell now has more than

60 farmers in his marketing area growing sesame. For him the crop is a

natural choice. A grower can use the same equipment in planting and harvesting as

one would with wheat “a wheat drill for planting and a wheat header

on a combine for harvesting the crop. As of Monday, Sidwell was paying producers

34 cents a pound for sesame. Sesaco officials warn the price varies across the

state. Sesame breaks down to about 45 pounds per bushel. Sesame is not an

open market commodity.” Sesaco is the only major firm in the U.S. buying and selling the oil seed. Farmers sign contracts with Sesaco field representatives securing pricing for their crop. Sesaco maintains a sesame processing plant in Hobart, in far southwest Oklahoma. Sidwell has three semis to haul sesame there from his Kremlin elevator. Jared Johnson, a Sesaco field representative, sees Sidwell’s story as one being repeated across Oklahoma, especially west of Interstate 35. “This year we have seen 65,000 acres of sesame harvested in Oklahoma,” Johnson says. “It has more than doubled over the last three years. Farmers have been seeing anywhere from 700 to 750 pounds per acre.” Last year, 12.7 million pounds of sesame was produced in Oklahoma and Texas. The entire harvest of both states is processed at Sesaco’s Hobart plant, and what is not sold in the U.S. is shipped to Japan. For the past two years, Oklahoma State University’s Lahoma Agricultural Research Site has been studying the advantages of sesame as a double crop in comparison with soybean and milo, said Josh Lofton, cropping systems specialist for OSU. According to Lofton, Oklahoma has been harvesting sesame since 1996, but much of that production has been in small acreages in southwest Oklahoma, and mostly in cotton fields. In the last five years, Oklahoma’s sesame production has been increasing substantially, he said. Planting time for sesame is May through June, and harvesting is after the first freeze in late October or November. “I think the future for sesame is bright as long as wheat prices continue the way they do,” Sidwell said. “There’s more excitement for it this year than last year.” Shear economics compounded by dry conditions have caused Oklahoma farmers to try other cash crops than traditional wheat. Currently wheat is bringing roughly \$3.78 a bushel with a January futures amount of \$4.39 a bushel. Cost of producing a bushel of wheat is just over \$5 an acre, according to Kansas State University’s agriculture department. “Certainly Oklahoma ag producers have become much more agile in regard to crops and commodity markets,” said Reese, the state secretary of agriculture. “Where wheat prices have struggled, producers have looked to

more profitable crops.â€• Subscribe to Daily Headlines Sign up! * I understand and agree
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