AGRICULTURE IN IDAHO
WHEAT EARNED IDAHO GROWERS $796 MILLION IN 2012. BARLEY ADDED $306 MILLION, BOOSTING THE SMALL GRAINS’ TOTAL TO $1.1 BILLION. WHEAT IS IDAHO’S ONLY MAJOR CROP WITH 10 STRAIGHT ANNUAL GAINS, LAST YEAR TRIPLING 2003’S TOTAL. BARLEY RECEIPTS DOUBLED DURING THE DECADE.


Public-private partners celebrate new wheat research collaboration to boost Idaho crop

CONTACT Donn Thill at dthill@uidaho.edu

A WARM, SUNNY DAY LAST JULY greeted a University of Idaho College of Agricultural and Life Sciences celebration of partnerships to boost wheat research and extension efforts that benefit the state’s growers.

Idaho Wheat Commission, Limagrain Cereal Seeds (LCS), and University of Idaho representatives joined in to view variety trials at the Palouse Research, Extension and Education Center east of Moscow.

The variety trials showcased an increased number of wheat lines over previous years that were developed by the university and Limagrain, one of the world’s largest seed companies. The field day provided a chance to view winter wheat nearing maturity with an array of heights, head shapes, and other marks of genetic diversity.

Doug Finkelnburg, a college staff scientist assigned to oversee the wheat trials, said growers had a lot more diversity to view than in the past. The number of early and advanced generation research plots jumped from some 3,700 in 2011 to 5,200 in 2012.

"Where there is collaboration, there is opportunity," said Cathy Wilson, the Idaho Wheat Commission’s director of collaborative research, commenting on cooperation between private and public research that encourages rapid advances in grain production.

The field day offered a great opportunity to show off both the University of Idaho and LCS wheat programs and explain how the breeding collaboration will work, said Jim Peterson, LCS vice president for research. "From our side, we are bringing a valuable international germplasm base to the collaboration, including parent lines with exceptional yield potential and disease resistances," Peterson added.

CALS plant breeder assesses USDA oilseeds

CONTACT Jack Brown at jbrown@uidaho.edu

GREENER JET FUEL IS ONE GOLDEN GOAL for new canola and oilseed varieties developed by UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences plant breeder Jack Brown, Moscow.

Brown’s work with canola, rapeseed, and mustard varieties shifted into high gear last year as part of a $7 million project to evaluate the USDA Agricultural Research Service oilseed germplasm collection’s 2,000 lines.

His project will both grow the collection to record the plants’ physical characteristics—their phenotypes—and record the plants’ individual genetic catalogs—their genotypes.

Matching plant physical traits with their genetic traits can speed variety development. “Effectively, you can build a genotype into the plant you want,” he said. Awaiting discovery are genes that boost fertilizer-use efficiency, increase the plant’s ability to capture sunlight, and enhance its ability to adapt to climate change.

A related biofuel project will task Brown with growing 100,000 pounds of oil from one of his new varieties, the winter rapeseed named Durola. The oil will be tested for suitability as the base for a biofuel for U.S. Navy jets.

“It goes without saying that if the Navy starts using even a small amount of jet fuel made from rapeseed oil, that’s an enormous amount of rapeseed oil,” Brown said.

 College begins fielding wheat support team

CONTACT Donn Thill at dthill@uidaho.edu

SMALL GRAINS, WHEAT AND BARLEY, are the biggest focus of a push by the UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences to keep Idaho’s growers on the cutting edge of production.

Reflecting support from public and private partners, notably by the Idaho Wheat Commission and Limagrain Cereal Seeds, the college is growing its research and extension team. It will help wheat and barley growers who in 2012 reaped a projected $1.1 billion in cash receipts.

Northern Idaho’s growers will see the first results with the recent hiring of a Lewiston-based regional extension crop educator. Researcher Doug Finkelnburg fills the position vacant since 2009 as the college grappled with budget cuts.

Searches are under way for the other members of the new cereals team. Interviews are scheduled with candidates for a plant nutritionist research job to be based at Moscow, as will a cropping systems agronomist job.

The university’s Aberdeen Research and Extension Center will serve as home for two more jobs: an entomologist and another cropping systems agronomist.

Parma Research and Extension Center will be home for a cropping systems agronomist, who will also serve as center superintendent.

The team’s distribution across the state reflects the importance of cereal crops, said Donn Thill, Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station director at Moscow. “Although the agronomists will focus on wheat, they will also work with rotation crops including barley, potatoes, sugar beets, peas, garbanzo beans, corn, and oilseeds. We need their expertise in different growing areas,” Thill said.

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