



The Seed Source

NEWSLETTER OF THE KANSAS CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

June 2009

Important Dates

June 14

Flag Day

June 21

Father's Day

First Day of Summer

July 4

Independence Day

July 24

Application for Field

Inspection on Fall Inspected

Crops due

August 14

Wheat Harvest Report due

These dates can also be found on our website under the tab labeled "Calendar"

An updated Field Day schedule can be found on our website at www.kscrop.org

Congratulations to David Leonard from Goodland. He is the winner of a \$25 gift card to Cabela's for participating in our website survey.

THE SEED SOURCE

Sarah E. Velasquez, Editor

If you would like to receive "The Seed Source" via email, please contact me at sevkcia@kansas.net

K-State Wheat Blast Project

Wheat blast, a fungal pathogen first identified in Brazil in 1985, has proven to be very destructive in nature, with yield losses reported to be as high as 64 percent. This disease has not yet spread to U.S. wheat, but the potential is high. On April 15, members of a Kansas State University research group, headed by Dr. Barbara Valent, a professor in Plant Pathology, presented a plan to research this pathogen in an effort to proactively prepare for a possible induction of wheat blast into the U.S. The group, including Dr. Bill Bockus, Dr. Xiaoyan Tang, and Dr. Jim Stack, has received a grant for almost \$1 million from USDA to conduct this research, and will be working collaboratively with USDA-ARS in Maryland as well as a research group in Brazil.

It is unknown whether wheat blast pathogens may already exist in the U.S., but simply have not had favorable

environmental factors to lead to epidemics. However, there are closely related strains which have been found in turf grasses and rice. Evolution, or the emergence of new strains of these existing pathogens, is a possible means of induction. Infected seed has been shown to spread the disease in Brazil; therefore, trade and travel between Brazil and the U.S. is also a potential threat.



There are three objectives to the proposed research project. The first is to develop tools for rapid detection and accurate diagnosis of the wheat blast pathogen, including genome sequence, development of PCR markers, and development of protocols for wheat blast diagnosis. Objective two is to identify sources of resistance to the pathogen, which will involve screening existing varieties and determining the genetic characterization of

See "Blast" on reverse

To Russia with Love

by Vance Ehmke, from his email newsletter, March 28 titled 'Wheat and more... or less'

How would you like to buy a 100,000-acre farm with 7-foot deep soils in an area that gets 30 inches of annual precip? And how would you like to pay \$40/acre for it?

And if you think a 100,000-acre farm is too small, why not just buy 1 million acres? In short, how would you like to move to Russia?

I got a phone call last week from one of four directors of production on a 750,000-acre farm that's located 500 miles south of Moscow. Since we're certified seed wheat dealers, he was obviously looking for seed wheat. In particular, he was looking for some of the hot new US varieties—things like TAM 112. And for good reason—the varieties they're using over there are 60 to 70 years old.

This farm manager has been here on our farm in western Kansas on several occasions. I had lost track of him till he called. But what a story he's got to tell! And one thing for sure—we farmers here in the US had better be listening.

I think a lot of us have been lulled into thinking that the only serious competition left in the agricultural world is down in Brazil or Argentina. Think again. Eastern Europe and especially Russia promises to give us the race of our lives.

No kidding. There are huge tracts of land for sale in Russia. The old collective farms that just simply didn't work have in a lot of cases laid idle for 15 years and

See "Russia" on reverse

“Blast” continued

the resistance. Objective three is to establish training resources and a web-based network to facilitate diagnosis of wheat blast pathogens and allow for the distribution of resistance resources. This objective will be accomplished by the development of classroom training, laboratory instruction and workshops, as well as an on-line curriculum.

Due to the highly sensitive nature of this pathogen, much of the three year research project will be conducted on the K-State campus at the Biosecurity Research Institute in Pat Roberts Hall. This unique, biosafety level three (BSL-3) containment facility will accommodate the extensive needs of the project while maintaining the utmost protection of the U.S. wheat growing region.

For more information on the Biosecurity Research Institute at Pat Roberts Hall, please visit www.bri.ksu.edu.

Eric Fabrizious, Laboratory Manager

“Russia” continued

more. And on the collective farms that did work, they’ve been clinging to financial life dealing with recent low grain prices and dwindling cash reserves.

The result is that you can buy all the ground that you can imagine. “You have no idea how much land we’ve been offered,” says my acquaintance. He works for a Swedish-English investment company. On the farm, they grow mainly winter wheat, but also triticale, spring barley and sunflowers, as well as some corn and sugar beets, for instance. And he’s convinced modern farming and capitalistic ideas will work in the former Evil Empire.

So are a lot of others. “There are a lot of big companies moving into Russia—and they’re buying land, not renting it. We’ve got over 20 new John Deere combines, as well as big 4-wheel drive tractors and 60-foot drills and 36-row planters.”

And while land is probably the biggest cost of farming in the US, it certainly isn’t over there. These are some of the best soils on the planet—and you can have all you want for \$40/acre.

Years ago I read that of all the places in the world where huge modern farms could make gigantic and rapid steps forward was in Russia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe—on the collective farms, of all places. One of the last places where you’d see such progress was in Western Europe where farms were much smaller and heavily subsidized.

The thinking was that the collective farms were already huge, but had been

simply hampered by central planning and communist economics. Remove those inefficiencies and replace them with a desire to make money and, well, I guess we’re getting ready to find out if these ideas will work.

Make no doubt about it, though, these new foreign investor farms clearly have their work cut out for them. While they’ve got great land and very cheap prices, there are other very large problems. There is little to no infrastructure. And with winter wheat, for instance, they are still planting antique varieties. Grain markets are poorly developed. And there’s nothing like our land-grant university or Extension Service to provide help to farmers.

Some years back I was in Eastern Europe myself and will never forget the train ride across Poland. We boarded the train on the eastern side near Russia and traveled across the entire country to Germany on the west. When I got off the train, I was absolutely dumbfounded at the incredible and very much underused natural resource of these countries.

When I got back to the US, I called Barry Flinchbaugh at K-State and asked him how much longer it would be before we had to confront this. He said it would be a generation. While they’ve got the resource, they’ve also got a lot of problems.

I mentioned that to my friend. And he said it’s not going to take that long. It won’t take 25 years. I said, 10 years? And he said, “maybe less”.

Get to know your KCIA Board and Staff: Maurice Miller



Name: Maurice Miller

Position: Board Member

Employment: Sharp Bros Seed Co.

Family: Wife Lila; Daughters Lisa, Angela, and Crystal; two grandchildren.

Organizations: KCIA, KSIA, Kansas Wheat Alliance, Society for Range Management, Kansas Livestock Association, Kansas Grain & Feed, AgSeco, AgVantage IP, Quail Unlimited.

Hobbies/Interests: Pheasant & quail hunting, Woodworking, ‘tormenting’ daughters and grandchildren.

Most important issues for KCIA: Being prepared for, and expecting, changes in agriculture and society.

The best things in life are... Family and friends.

Editor’s Note

If you are interested in information on farm management, agricultural policy, and marketing, be sure to check out the Risk and Profit Conference August 20-21. This conference is directed by the Department of Agricultural Economics at K-State. The information sessions and trade show will be held at the K-State Alumni Center.

For more information visit www.agmanager.info and click on the Risk and Profit Conference link, or call 785-532-1504.

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