

Small Grains Breeding Yields **BIG** Results

Sungrains, the cooperative small grains breeding program of five southeastern U.S. universities, has yielded big results with the release of two new oat varieties and two new wheat varieties.

The oat varieties were developed cooperatively by the LSU AgCenter and the University of Florida. One, LA99106, was developed primarily at the LSU AgCenter, and the other originated in the Florida program.

In addition, Sungrains released two wheat varieties developed by the University of Georgia.

“Sungrains is thriving and doing well,” said Dr. Steve Harrison, a small grains breeder in the LSU AgCenter.

The new LSU AgCenter variety is very high grain yielding and has been near the top of tests in Louisiana and surrounding states for several years, Harrison said. It also topped the Louisiana forage trials this year.

“We feel that LA99106 will meet the demand for a high-quality oat that serves as both a grain and forage,” Harrison said. “It has proven to possess superior yield characteristics with excellent lodging scores. Of particular note is the high resistance to crown rust and stem rust.”

It is the seventh oat variety released by the LSU AgCenter since 1997, and LA99106 has higher grain yield, test weight and forage yield than most publicly available varieties, Harrison said.

Because one of the leading uses for oats in Louisiana is early winter pasture for dairy cows, Harrison is high on LA99106 as a forage crop.

“It has high quality and grows well in the fall,” Harrison said. “It provides good early grazing, has a high forage yield and fits very well with dairy production.”

Oats are a low-input crop, Harrison said. They require minimum inputs and low-nitrogen fertilizer and have low seed cost.

Oats are growing in popularity as a forage in the South.

Because of growing pressure on corn prices, many cattle producers are finding it difficult to afford to finish cattle exclusively with grain, so they’re turning to winter pastures with oats to compensate. For example, Harrison estimates Texas has about 1 million acres of oats that provide pasture for cattle.

Although the new variety is a good grain yielder, not much oat acreage in Louisiana or the South is devoted to oats as grain. Some growers, however, have developed niche markets to provide grain to horsemen. Harrison estimates 15,000 to 20,000 acres are grown for grain in Louisiana each year.

“The market potential and benefits are quite large from a farm perspective,” he said.

Oats also are widely used for wild-life food plots in the South to provide winter forage for deer.

In addition to oats, Harrison devotes a significant portion of his efforts to developing new wheat varieties adapted to Louisiana.

“Wheat is generating a lot of excitement in the farming community this year,” Harrison said. “Louisiana acreage grew last winter and is expected to grow even more this year. Every bag of seed will be planted this fall, weather permitting.”

Rising wheat prices can be attributed to worldwide shortages.

“Global production problems will create tremendous demand,” Harrison said. “The excitement is proof wheat will be a profitable cash crop.”

Harrison cites a cold winter in 2007 as contributing to a shortage of seed wheat for the coming season.

A good variety is LA841, which is a major player in Louisiana, where it was planted on about one-half of the acreage last year and is expected to be widely planted again this year.

As for new variety development, Harrison said he’s getting close to having a scab-resistant wheat variety ready for release. He said it should do well in the rice-producing areas of the state and that its performance potential should be the same as LA841.

“We had a good year in research both in data collection and in the crossing program,” Harrison said of his small grains program. “And with the Sungrains cooperative, we’re able to expand our program.”

“We leverage funding from the Louisiana Soybean and Grain Research and Promotion Board,” Harrison added. The board “is critical for providing base funding,” but the variety royalties provide the funds to purchase equipment beyond what would be available from the board. Grants from federal agencies also support research activities, he said. Rick Bogren

Photo by Mark Claesgens



LSU AgCenter small grains researcher Dr. Steve Harrison examines wheat in a research plot on the AgCenter's Ben Hur Farm in Baton Rouge.