

Crop Management

WSU's wheat going strong

By T.J. BURNHAM

IT'S a double wheat payoff for Washington-bred varieties and the residue they leave after harvest.

News from the Washington Agricultural Statistics Service announces that most of the spring and winter varieties grown in the state are developed by local research, a sign that money the state's growers put into research is paying off.

But the regional good news doesn't

Key Points

- Most Washington wheat varieties are from Washington State University.
- A new resin process can lower strawboard production costs.
- Fiberboard industry growth could result in multimillion-dollar business increases.

end there. Washington State University researchers who breed the wheat for area growers also say 4 million tons of

the leftover straw produced each year in the Pacific Northwest may have a new market.

Thanks for the residue breakthrough goes to WSU's International Marketing Program for Agricultural Commodities & Trade, or IMPACT, which says a process developed to spin the crop waste into fiberboard could mean important new sales for the wheat industry.

Credit goes to Marie-Pierre Laborie, an assistant professor in the university's Civil and Environmental Engineering



GRAINS OF PROMISE: Washington grain growers pick state-bred wheats more than any other varieties.

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Department, who has found a way to alter components that use adhesive resins to produce a wheat-board product. Such products stand a good chance of meeting American National Standards Institute requirements and cutting the cost of resins now used by 30%.

"Many strawboard plants are expensive to run because of the cost of resins," she explains of her work to look at alternative, low-cost resins.

Her success could have quite an impact for wheat residue. She believes that for each mid-sized board plant now running in the PNW, revenue for farmers could leap by \$5 million, and the job market could be augmented to the tune of hundreds of new workers.

Board feats

Washington alone has enough resources to supply 40 such plants and help the state's economy spiral upward by \$200 million, Laborie adds.

Like the new potential for strawboard income, the fact that most growers use wheat varieties bred by WSU is another economic plus for the state, since it is viewed as an incentive for grower groups to continue funding the university research of wheat cultivars.

Spring wheat is estimated at 450,000 acres, and winter wheat is estimated at 1.8 million acres, according to the Washington Agricultural Statistics Service. The four most widely grown winter wheat varieties in the state — all WSU breeds — include the soft white common varieties of Eltan and Madsen, a soft white club variety named Bruehl, and Bauermeister, a hard red variety.

Stephen Jones, a WSU winter wheat breeder, developed and released Bruehl and Bauermeister.

Spring wheat varieties developed at WSU also gained ground.

Louise, a soft white common spring wheat variety, surpassed Alpowa as the spring wheat acreage leader in the state. Eden, a spring club from WSU, ranked fourth in the soft white spring variety in commercial production, while Scarlet, Hollis and Tara 2002 collectively accounted for nearly 20% of the hard red spring wheat acreage.

Kim Kidwell, WSU spring wheat breeder, developed and released all of those, except Alpowa.

"This 2007 acreage data is very promising," says Dan Bernardo, dean of the WSU College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences.

"WSU varieties are gaining market share in all major classes, and new varieties with improved genetics are replacing older varieties. I am particularly impressed with the rapid increase of acreage in Stephen Jones' Bauermeister variety," he adds.