

New cereals R&D pact formalised

Bayer CropScience is expanding its global research and development activities in seeds and traits to include a focus on cereals. In support of this expansion, the company recently formalised a long-term alliance with the CSIRO – one of the world's leading institutions in the development of new wheat varieties.

The agreement establishes a far-reaching joint research and development program between CSIRO and Bayer CropScience, aimed at improving the productivity and sustainability of cereal production utilising modern techniques. The cooperation will broaden the strong research and development basis of Bayer's seeds and traits business, which is currently focused on cotton,

canola, rice and vegetables. The company also offers innovative trait solutions for the soybean and corn seed industry.

Bayer now intends to extend its portfolio by developing improved plant characteristics for wheat.

With about 25 per cent of the global agricultural land under wheat cultivation, wheat is the largest cereal crop in terms of acreage and one of the world's most important staple foods.

Traits to target

Both parties will set up a number of research and development projects in the area of traits and their introgression into cereal germplasm, the goal being to develop

cereal varieties with higher yield, more efficient nutrient utilisation and tolerance against abiotic stress such as drought.

One of the initial projects of this collaboration is dedicated to the development of wheat lines with improved yield potential and stress tolerance, while another focuses on wheat lines with improved utilisation of phosphorus.

These and other research projects are expected to result in new varieties available to farmers from 2015 onwards.

"Australia and the world at large are facing a number of challenges affecting food security and supply such as changing climate, the decline of mineral resources used for fertiliser and the need to increase crop yields to feed an ever increasing world population," said Dr Jeremy Burdon, CSIRO's Plant Industry Chief.

"(This alliance) will focus on the specific wheat problems farmers are facing today and conduct targeted research to solve those problems. By doing so, we will ensure more rapid delivery of solutions to wheat farmers."

Tackling food security

"Extending our trait research activities to cereals is fully in line with our commitment to deliver solutions for agricultural sustainability and to help tackle the issues of global food security," said Dr. Joachim Schneider, Head of the BioScience Business Unit at Bayer CropScience. "We look forward to working together with CSIRO in this area. Together we will create one of the leading research and development platforms in cereals worldwide."

"Drawing on our strength in carbohydrate research and our existing wheat portfolio, Bayer CropScience aims to become the partner of choice to the wheat industry and will offer superior technology solutions to improved cereal productivity moving forward."

The new program follows on from an existing collaboration between the two organisations, which has led to a number of successful research discoveries including improved fibre quality in cotton, and CSIRO's pioneering gene silencing technology. The business with seeds and traits is of growing importance for Bayer.

The company plans to invest some AUD\$1.25 billion in the development of new solutions in its seeds and traits business from 2008 to 2012. ■

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