



Breaking News on Food & Beverage Development - North America

US, Canadian and Aussie wheat industries unite behind GM

By Caroline Scott-Thomas, 15-May-2009

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Major wheat industry organizations from the US, Canada and Australia have announced that they intend to work together to commercialize genetically modified (GM) wheat crops.

Although other GM crops have been in use for several years, there is currently not a single GM wheat variety commercially available. This is partly due to consumer resistance to GM wheat, particularly in Europe, a situation that has resulted in a dearth of funding for biotech wheat research.

In a joint statement issued on Thursday, the organizations said: *"While none of us hold a veto over the actions of others, we believe it is in all of our best interests to introduce biotech wheat varieties in a coordinated fashion to minimize market disruptions and shorten the period of adjustment."*

Competition from GM

The organizations said that one of the main problems they face is declining acreage planted to wheat as arable farmers turn to other grains with *"the advantages of biotech traits."*

Meanwhile, the US Department of Agriculture has forecast that the US winter wheat harvest will be down by 20 percent in 2009/10.

"The longer it takes to increase the growth rate the bigger will be the hole from which the industry must climb," the organizations said.

The USDA's forecast for the US differs from the global picture however. Worldwide, it predicts that wheat yield will drop by four percent in 2009/10, but added that if realized, the harvest would still be the second largest ever.

Fighting hunger?

The wheat representatives' statement claims that biotechnology is an important tool for fighting world hunger, with the potential for disease, drought and insect resistant crops, or for improving wheat's nutritional aspects.

"Biotechnology is not the only answer to these questions," it says, *"But it will be a significant component in solutions."*

GM crops have long been promoted as a possible solution for world hunger, but a recent report from Friends of the Earth pointed out that promised traits such as increased yield and enhanced nutrition still do not exist. It added that herbicide tolerance is the most prevalent trait currently in use, accounting for 82 percent of GM crop acreage in 2007.

On the contentious issue of GM crop safety, the wheat industry statement said: *"Over 10 years of global experience with biotechnology has demonstrated a convincing record of safety and environmental benefits as well as quality and productivity gains."*

US signatories to the statement are the National Association of Wheat Growers, US Wheat Associates, and the North American Millers' Association.

Canadian signatories are Grain Growers of Canada, Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission.

And Australian signatories are the Grains Council of Australia, Grain Growers Association, and Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia.

The full statement can be accessed [here](#) .

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