

In With the New

PLANT BREEDERS WORK HARD to come up with new and exciting plant varieties that could eventually increase the options and opportunities available to seed growers and farmers. The Prairie Grain Development Committee and the Western Canada Canola/Rapeseed Recommending Committee each met in February to select the next crop of cultivars that will soon be filling growers' bins.

Fast Tracking Canola

In an unprecedented move, the WCC/RCC recommended a canola variety after only a single year of data. The Pioneer Hi-Bred variety appears to show resistance to clubroot which has been spreading like wildfire across Alberta. The company is seeking early registration of the hybrid in 2009, with limited seed to be available. A full commercial launch will follow in the spring of 2010. The variety, which contains the Roundup Ready trait as well as strong agronomic characteristics, was developed by transferring non-genetically modified clubroot-resistance into elite Pioneer genetics.

In total 65 varieties were supported by the WCC/RCC including 12 Clearfield, nine Liberty Link, and 41 Roundup Ready napus lines plus 3 conventional rapa lines. Healthy eating trends are obviously influencing breeding now more than ever, as 21 of the supported varieties are low linoleic. The WCC/RCC also passed a motion to change the merit-based system to include only quality traits, such as oil content and protein, rather than assessing agronomic and disease traits as well. These changes would come into effect for varieties entering the testing system in 2009.

Wheat, Rye, and Triticale

The Prairie Recommending Committee for Wheat, Rye and Triticale recommended 20 new cultivars for registration at the 2009 meetings: nine Canada Western Red Spring wheat cultivars; five Canada Western General Purpose cultivars of which three were winter wheats; one Canada Western Amber Durum cultivar; one Canada Prairie Spring Red wheat cultivar, and one spring spelt wheat cultivar. Highlights for the recommended cultivars included increased yield potential, early maturity, improved disease resistance including fusarium head blight and leaf spotting resistance, orange wheat blossom midge resistance, and resistance to Clearfield herbicides.

Pulses and Special Crops

Thirteen new varieties of dry beans were supported for registration, with lines showing improvements in yield, maturity and seed colour size which will give producers a premium. Eight new lines of lentils were supported, with the introduction of the first medium red lentil in this class tolerant to imidazolinone herbicides. There was a focus on seed types that target markets in the Middle East, South Asia, and South America. Three new varieties of peas and two new fababean varieties were also supported for registration.

Oats and Barley

The Prairie Recommending Committee on Oat and Barley supported a diverse range of barley varieties this year, ranging from high yielders with a good malting profile, to hullless varieties with malting potential. The number of new lines are:

- Two-row barley – 3
- Six-row barley – 3
- Hullless barley – 2
- Forage – 1

Also discussed was an update to last year's request that certain varieties be exempt from loose smut testing. The CFIA responded to the request and would like two members of the committee to act as advisors to help them come up with a solution. Two members were voted to take on this responsibility and the hope is this will come into affect this year which would benefit seed growers as this testing, which is very costly, has been required to obtain blue tags for certified seed.

On the oat side, the committee supported the only oat variety submitted. It showed increased total dietary fibre and beta glucan, and is a high yielding oat for the non-rust areas of Canada. **Julie McNabb**