



RESTRUCTURING WHEAT

After seeing wheat crops fail across the state last year, several seed companies in the United States have begun research in genetically modified wheat with the hope that the need has overcome the objections.

At the turn of the 21st Century one of the main seed providers, Monsanto, was spearheading research focused on the production of genetically engineered wheat seed. However, due to the broad opposition the project was shelved.

"Monsanto actually were about ready to go with a Roundup Ready trait [in wheat]," said Jackie Rudd, a wheat breeder for Texas AgriLife research. "They decided there wasn't a consumer acceptance in the U.S."

After the climatic events of the past two years the idea of having a drought-resistant strain of wheat has fueled the revival of this research in the hopes that consumers and producers have had a change of heart from 10 years ago.

The communications director of the Texas Wheat Producers Board and Association, Steelee Fischbacher, said according to a survey recently conducted by the association, 76% of respondents supported the commercialization of biotechnology in the field of wheat seed.

"The wheat producers had a 'let's wait and see' attitude 10 years ago," said Rudd. "During that time they saw the corn acres rise, they saw the soybean acres rise, they saw the price of corn and soybeans going up."

With the support of consumers and producers, the wheels of progress have started


rolling again for genetically modified wheat. According to the Stock & Land website, Bayer Crop Sciences has recently signed an agreement with Texas AgriLife to develop and commercialize new wheat varieties.

Wheat is one of the few staple crops that has seen little to no advancement in productivity, as compared to other crops like corn and soybeans. Obstacles like droughts just make productions numbers go backwards.

"If wheat is going to be a main player in U.S. agriculture," said Fischbacher of the Texas wheat industry, "we've really got to step up our game."

According to Fischbacher, we could see genetically engineered wheat seed hitting the market in a decade. Wheat is currently in line behind a few other grains to be approved by the USDA. Once genetically engineered wheat takes the stage for approval, that process could take years.

Despite the timeline on an actual commercialized product, Texas producers and researchers remain confident in biotechnology for wheat.

"I feel that the technology has proven itself," said Rudd. "And it's safe." 

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