

Here's to our area's Wheat Producers

For your untiring efforts to put food on tables throughout this great land, and on the tables around the world. Your challenges are many, and deserve a chorus of thanks on "Harvest 2006."

Extension office works with wheat year round

By Tisha Cox
Colby Free Press

Wheat harvest may be winding down or over in some cases, but at the Northwest Research-Extension Center, the wheat work never stops.

Rob Aiken, crop research specialist and research director, said research done there is representative of the conditions farmers deal with everyday.

Wheat is the foundation of the cropping system here, so the work with the crop affects every grower.

He said the work done by research technologist Pat Evans is especially important.

"What he does is fundamental," Aiken said. "He has no commercial interest in one line over another. The impartial tests give farmers an unbiased measure of

how they (wheat lines) do in local conditions."

Aiken said the extension center's wheat plots received hail damage before the performance trials were ready to be harvested.

Disease resistance was being tested, and signs were pointing to some interesting results.

"We lost that opportunity because of the hail damage," he said. "We had some nice looking wheat."

Up to 60 lines are researched in the performance tests, and involve commercial and public lines of wheat.

Tested were spring wheats, hard red winter wheat and hard white winter wheat.

"The big effort in western Kansas is to improve wheat production," Aiken said.

In a test, each line of wheat is randomly planted four times on one acre of land. He said the variabil-

ity tells how consistent the test is.

All of the wheat is treated exactly the same, and Evans' research has a consistent margin of error of 10 percent or less.

"That's the target they strive for," Aiken said.

He added the turnaround on the research is quick so the information can be given to farmers in time to make their seed selections for planting in August.

Currently, there are eight different wheat studies going on in the center's crop program.

Agricultural engineer Freddie Lamm is working on an irrigated wheat study; other research is focusing on how other crops grown in rotation affect wheat yields.

Aiken said research shows continuous cropping isn't good for grain production during drought.

A field doesn't get a chance for moisture to build back up when

continuously cropped. But leaving it fallow for a year builds up moisture, and means better growing conditions.

Aiken said area agronomist Brian Olson is doing research, in conjunction with the Kansas Wheat Commission, on continuous wheat production.

He said under such a system, wheat could be harvested in early July, then re-planted with wheat in mid-September.

That would allow about two and a half months for the field to build up moisture.

The focus in Colby right now is to see how cropping systems and sequences affect wheat yields.

Research yields have been "respectable," with good stands and seed fill.

"It could be good," Aiken said. "We appreciate the support of the wheat commission."



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Rob Aiken, crop research specialist and research director at the Northwest Research-Extension Center in Colby, looked at wheat stubble from one of the center's test plots Thursday. The center's wheat research focuses on improving wheat yields. Wheat from the test plots was harvested this week.

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