

Genetic Markers Will Be Boom To Cotton Breeders

KEISER, ARK.

The donation of thousands cotton genetic markers will be a boon for cotton breeders seeking improved varieties, said Dr. Fred Bourland, director of the Northeast Research and Extension Center of the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture.

Monsanto has donated about 5,000 molecular markers on the cotton genome to the public domain, allowing public researchers to have some 10,000 markers available to map the cotton genome. The markers will be included in Cotton DB, a cotton database housed at Texas A&M.

Cotton breeding and genetics are the center of Bourland's career.

"This will be a great tool," he said. "It doesn't replace traditional breeding, but forms a link between the molecular and the traditional

breeder that has been a gap for years."

Plant breeding can be a frustrating profession. Sometimes one trait will mask the expression of another.

"It's like trying to get a bunch of monkeys up the same tree. By the time you do, one falls out," he said.

Bourland said the markers may improve the chances for a breeders' success.

"Once markers associated with favorable genes are found, the breeder select offspring having specific markers and there's a high probability that the selection will have the associated favorable genes."

There's an additional benefit too, said Bourland.

"This will be a great way to train graduate students," he said. △



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