

MU To Premiere New Wheat Variety

COLUMBIA, MO.

Farmers will soon have a new variety of wheat that promises high yields and excellent qualities in milling.

University of Missouri researchers spent the past 12 years refining and testing a new soft red winter wheat line released this summer and expected to be widely available as certified seed next fall.

Wheat breeder Anne McKendry noted that this variety – dubbed the Milton line – has performed extremely well in statewide testing and in regional tests that vetted it against the best new varieties around the country.

In university testing, Milton boasted an average yield of 64 bushels per acre in the past six years at four testing sites throughout Missouri, besting all previous varieties developed by the university program.

“It’s won the commercial trials here in Missouri against everything in the three-year average, and when we put Milton in the eastern and southern tests both, it ranked in the top five in a wide range of geographic locations,” McKendry said.

Part of what makes this variety novel is its wide adaptability to climates with longer and shorter daylight hours. This trait, called “photoperiod insensitivity,” gives Milton an edge in states that receive less sunlight in the growing months.

“In general, plants require a certain day length to flower,” she said. “Some flower as the day lengthens, some as the day shortens, but this particular variety has a gene that makes it insensitive to day length, so it will flower regardless of the length of the day.”

In milling and baking tests by the USDA and companies like ConAgra and Kraft, the new variety topped all others slated for release.

“Milton’s claim to fame is one of the highest ratings in the USDA’s Soft Wheat Quality Laboratory,” said David Tague, senior research specialist at MU’s Bradford Research and Extension Center near Columbia. “It has an unusually high fraction of flour and extremely good functionality for all of the soft-wheat applications – making cookies, crackers, biscuits, pancakes and other pastries.

“I make pancakes with it routinely and we’ve gotten to where we like it better than just about anything.”

Soft red winter wheat encompasses approximately 95 percent of all wheat planted in Missouri and typically is used in pastries, while hard red winter wheat – prevalent in states like Kansas – is ground to flour for use in bread products.

The Milton line, named after longtime MU wheat breeder J. Milton Poehlman, should be available through certified seed dealers next fall. Poehlman began the MU seed-breeding program in 1939 and continued his work for more than 50 years, crossing varieties to produce wheat

**MU Research Specialist
Brendan Craughwell assists
in planting plots to test new wheat
varieties and assess the disease
resistance of old varieties.**



that is more resistant to common problems like scab and yellow rust.

The Milton line has moved on to large-scale production through Foundation Seeds and testing oversight through the Missouri Crop Improvement Association.

Richard Arnett, MCIA executive director, agreed that Milton seems impressive, but noted that it’s farmers who make or break a new variety.

“Milton is on the early end of the maturity spectrum and shows good yield and disease resistance in test data, but until you get it out in the real world and farmers have a chance to see it for themselves, they can be pretty fickle people,” Arnett said.

“I’ve given up guessing what farmers will buy, but if it performs the way it looks like it will, I think it has a chance of being pretty successful.”

More information about how Milton measures up to other varieties in 2009 wheat testing is at <http://agebb.missouri.edu/cropperf/wheat/soft/>. Δ

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