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MEDIA RELEASE

Yield Potential in Itself a Short Sighted Goal for Breeders

Although Yield Potential is much touted in summer crop breeding programmes, it is a short sighted goal in its own right, according to HSR Seeds Marketing Manager Kevin Collingridge. Yield Potential is never the be all and end all in a serious breeding programme, he said. There are plenty of good varieties out there in the market place right now that have all the yield potential growers could need to achieve highly rewarding financial returns from their summer cropping programmes. “All yield potential really tells you is what could happen when everything goes right. What is much more realistic for Australian farmers is finding out how varieties perform when things start to go wrong. We are vastly removed seasonally and geographically in most regions from consistently safe growing environments where the potential can be fully expressed” What is more important is the ability to construct hybrids that have the ability to meet the various challenges thrown at them. At HSR Seeds we call this “Yield Protection” which will provide more Harvest Security for our farmers. It is all about getting the header in at the end of the season and achieving a good economic return no matter what growing conditions are encountered.

Consistency and reliability are really what growers are chasing now they can't afford total crop failures. This is also being addressed across the industry by manipulating planting rates and row configurations, but hybrid selection plays a major role in achieving harvest security.

We need to be breeding for today's challenges, and a good example is ergot in grain sorghum. The simplest way to prevent ergot infection is to have good pollination and fertilization of the female part of the plant. Sometimes the weather conditions at flowering makes this difficult to achieve, but we do know that hybrids with a strong flow of highly viable pollen have a better chance of achieving fertilization in the sorghum ovule than poorer pollinating varieties, and therefore less ergot. Our grain sorghum varieties have been bred with that in mind, and we have been continually selecting for these traits over the years. The result of this is our “Pollen Power” range of sorghum hybrids. There are some old hybrids still on the market that were bred before Ergot was even found in Australia, so cannot have any resistance purposely bred into them. The other major challenges for Yield Protection are sorghum midge resistance and drought tolerance. Again we need to be at the leading edge with taking breeding lines through that have the latest advances in staygreen and midge resistance. We use QDPI genetics and other sources of germplasm (breeding lines) to meet these challenges. Currently Armour is the only 8 plus midge tested variety available on the market, and Venture is the only minimal tillering, high staygreen variety available. Having varieties with good standability is always a requirement of experienced sorghum growers in marginal to average environments, and we are continually culling promising new varieties, simply because they cannot handle either diseases or moisture stress that can cause lodging

We are fortunate to have commercial varieties that can yield up with the best of them. Mr. Collingridge added. Enforcer grain sorghum for instance has shattered yield records on a number of farms, and in both HSR Seeds and independent trials. It has actually broken the magic 13T/ha yield barrier in one of our Research Trials in Northern NSW, which has never been done before. Our two maize hybrids Olympiad and Hannibal conjointly share the



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Australian grain yield record of just on 21T/ha achieved in Victoria. What we are more concerned with though, is how our varieties perform on the average farm under average growing conditions, year in, year out. That is the real test for us. Being wholly Australian owned and operated, we are not owned, managed or directed in our agenda by an international chemical company, and this means we can direct our resources at what may not be large lucrative market segments, that may not be all that financially attractive to a multinational, yet they are still important to our local growers. We continue to bring forward new industry leading varieties, under the understanding that the proof is in the paddock, and consistent varietal performance will be what makes us successful in the future