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Western Australian growers urged to think ahead and control green bridge rust disease threat

Growers are being urged to keep paddocks clean following abundant January and February rainfall which has encouraged weed growth and the creation of a 'green bridge' which can host rust and other diseases and pests.

Department of Agriculture and Food WA plant pathologist Geoff Thomas said that a break without weeds of at least a month provides improved control and potential yield benefits, significantly reducing the risk of rusts and other disease and pest threats such as powdery mildew, viruses or aphids.

"It is critical that growers eradicate the green bridge as rust pathogens rely on green leaf material to survive and pass onto crops in the following season," Mr Thomas said.

"Growers must be vigilant and look for rust-susceptible weeds and crop volunteers not only in paddocks, but along fence lines, around sheds and silos. At least a month of no green growth is required to prevent disease survival."

Mr Thomas said rust is a social disease and encouraged growers to take collective action to minimise an early outbreak of rust and reduce disease pressure.

"In 2016, barley leaf rust was reported widely across the Western Australian wheatbelt, extending from the Esperance and lower great southern regions where it occurs regularly to the central and lower north regions as well," he said.

"Regrowth of susceptible varieties such as Bass are a high risk for carry over of barley leaf rust and should be targeted as high priority."

There were also a few instances of wheat leaf rust late in the 2016 season, with the pathotypes identified by the University of Sydney's Plant Breeding Institute as the recent incursions with increased virulence on popular local varieties such as Mace. Should growers find rust on volunteer cereals or grasses, they are encouraged to send samples for pathotype analysis.

"Leaf rust withstands summer temperatures better than stripe rust, so with a combination of high levels of the pathogen and most common wheat varieties having some degree of susceptibility, there is certainly a likelihood of leaf rust carrying over to 2017," Mr Thomas said.

"In regions where regrowth is widespread and remains uncontrolled until seeding of this seasons crops, choice of more resistant varieties and utilisation of registered fungicides at-seeding will be beneficial."

Rust resistance ratings and individual state variety guides are available on the Rust Bust website. Visit the Rust Bust at www.rustbust.com.au or follow @the_rustbust on Twitter.

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The Rust Bust campaign is an initiative of The Australian Cereal Rust Control Program (ACRCP) Consultative Committee. The ACRCP, established in 1973, monitors cereal rust pathogens throughout Australia, finds and characterises new sources of rust resistance, and assists Australian cereal breeding groups to incorporate rust resistance in new cultivars. The ACRCP Consultative Committee includes representatives from state pathology and breeding groups and provides a key link between industry and the ACRCP. The ACRCP is funded largely by the grains industry, through the Grains Research & Development Corporation (GRDC).

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