

Rust Bust Media Release

Wednesday, August 13, 2014

WA growers urged to keep eyes peeled for rust as weather warms

ISOLATED pockets of rust are starting to appear in Western Australian barley crops but new pathotypes of leaf rust discovered in wheat and barley in 2013 are causing some concern among growers and researchers.

Barley leaf rust was reported on the south coast of WA around Esperance last week, while there have also been some reports of rust in Baudin and Bass barley around the Stirling Ranges and Lower Great Southern area.

Department of Agriculture and Food WA plant pathologist Geoff Thomas said rust reports had been limited so far, which he attributed to a very dry 2013-14 summer.

“We didn’t really have a green bridge in many places at all so we didn’t have an obvious carryover of rust from last season,” Mr Thomas said.

“The interesting thing about last year was that new pathotypes of leaf rust were identified in both wheat and barley. The barley leaf rust has virulence for the resistance gene Rph3, which forms the base of resistance in varieties such as Bass.”

Mr Thomas said while no wheat rust had been reported yet in WA crops, there was some concern around the new leaf rust pathotype as it occurred last year in some crops of Mace, which was previously rated moderately resistant. Subsequent glasshouse testing has confirmed that this pathotype is virulent on Mace, which is currently the dominant wheat variety in WA.

His advice to growers is to keep their eyes open for rust.

“No one should be panicking because until rust occurs there is not a lot anyone can do but being aware and monitoring is extremely important. Conditions have been nice and damp in many areas, so if there is any rust around it will start to show up soon as it starts to warm up. The season is about to turn, and often this is about the time of the season that we start to see rust occurring in the wheatbelt.

“DAFWA is actively monitoring for any changes. We have some trials looking at yield losses that might occur from the new pathotypes. Rust screening now incorporates these new pathotypes and we are generating information about our varieties in the face of these new pathotypes.”

New South Wales Department of Primary Industries rust pathologist Dr William Cuddy said the Australian Cereal Rust Survey at the University of Sydney Plant Breeding Institute had received

samples of barley leaf rust from Western Australia, scabrum rust from Queensland, wheat leaf rust from northern NSW and SA, stripe rust from NSW and SA, oat crown rust from SA, oat crown rust from around Yass, NSW, and barley leaf rust from Junee and Wagga Wagga, NSW.

“Last year was a quiet year for the survey, though Professor Robert Park did detect new pathotypes of barley leaf rust and wheat leaf rust. This year it will come down to whether there will be a dry spring to limit rust development, which varies across the country as to what is expected. The main thing is if people notice rust they should send us a sample,” Dr Cuddy said.

“Growers need to plan their disease management strategy for the season. Because leaf rust started before the weather cooled down, it is likely to take off hard when it warms up in spring.”

Chairman of the Australian Cereal Rust Control Program consultative committee Dr Dan Mullan says rust is a “social” disease, and the committee is raising awareness of growers’ responsibilities in disease prevention and control through the Rust Bust campaign.

“Everyone has to be socially aware of rust. The impact one field can have on another in the event of an epidemic can be quite large, so being prepared for rust is quite important from a broader industry perspective,” Dr Mullan said.

“There is considerable investment into breeding and improving rust protection for Australian crops, but it’s important that this knowledge is extended to the farming community as well, which is where the Rust Bust comes in.”

Visit the Rust Bust at www.rustbust.com.au

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The Australian Cereal Rust Control Program (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 is funded largely by the grains industry, through the Grains Research & Development Corporation (GRDC).

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