

## Rust Bust Media Release

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### **Early rust outbreaks highlight need to eliminate green bridge**

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**EARLY reports of rust in volunteer crops has highlighted how important it is for growers to remain vigilant against the disease over summer and eliminate the green bridge.**

Stem rust has already been found in a crop of volunteer barley near Drysdale, on the Bellarine Peninsula in Victoria and is being tested by the Australian Cereal Rust Control Program (ACRCP) at the University of Sydney to determine its identity.

Widespread rain in early January followed by sunshine and warm weather has created ideal conditions for summer weeds and volunteer crops to thrive in, creating a green bridge which could carry rust pathogens into the next season.

ACRCP Consultative Committee chairman Dr Daniel Mullan says growers should be taking note of any volunteer weeds and crops that come up following summer rains and be sure to get a knockdown on them as soon as they can to eliminate the green bridge.

“It is critical that growers eliminate the green bridge as the rust pathogens rely on green leaf material to survive and pass onto crops in the following season,” Dr Mullan says. “A good knockdown of summer weeds gives a better chance of preventing or delaying an epidemic of rust this year.”

Some growers may also be considering growing a long-season dual-purpose wheat on the back of new research conducted in the high rainfall zone of south-eastern Australia. In light of that, the ACRCP is urging anyone going down that path to carefully consider which varieties they grow, as some long-season wheats are rated susceptible and very susceptible for stem rust and leaf rust. Stem rust in particular is much harder to control with fungicides than leaf rust and stripe rust.

In 2011, an industry survey found that many growers make variety selections based on the yield potential only. They did not factor in disease management costs or the costs of decreased yields following a disease outbreak.

Dr Mullan says growers must take care when choosing their varieties for the 2015 growing season.

“Staying away from varieties rated susceptible and very susceptible is a critical component of rust management,” he says.

For the best chance of beating rust, growers must have a five-part management strategy that extends through the year. This includes:

1. Removing the green bridge by mid-March or at least four weeks prior to sowing.
2. Growing varieties with adequate resistance to stem rust, stripe rust and leaf rust.
3. If needed, applying fungicides to seed, fertilisers or in-furrow for early season rust suppression.
4. Monitoring crops for rust and if needed, applying foliar fungicide for disease control.
5. Maintaining communication with neighbours, community and industry to monitor, report and manage rust.

"A rust outbreak in Australia has the potential to slash farm incomes, which is why it is so vital we plan our response to rust this year at the beginning of the season rather than waiting for a rust outbreak to occur and then plan a control approach," Dr Mullan says.

"There is plenty of help available if growers are not sure how susceptible their varieties are or which is the best approach to take – check with your local agronomist, plant pathologist, your regional cereal disease guide or visit the Rust Bust website.

"It's really important that growers be vigilant in their observations so we can get on top of any potential rust outbreak quickly. It's also important they keep sending rust samples in to the ACRCP so we can analyse them and have an early alert system to any pathotype changes."

Visit the Rust Bust at [www.rustbust.com.au](http://www.rustbust.com.au)

**ENDS**

**More information:**

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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).*