

March 1, 2007

News Release

Contact: Sue Canty, USWBSI Networking & Facilitation Office

Phone: 517-355-0271, Ext. 183 E-Mail: scabusa@scabusa.org

Fusarium Head Blight Forum Emphasizes Cooperation & Tangible Results in Fight against Scab

Action, Accountability, Results.

Those three words permeated the atmosphere throughout the 2006 National Fusarium Head Blight Forum, sponsored by the U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI). More than 170 crop scientists, grain growers and industry representatives from around the United States met in Durham, N.C., in mid-December for the 9th annual gathering of those working on the “front lines” in the effort to find solutions to problems caused by Fusarium Head Blight (Scab).

This year’s meeting format deviated from the traditional scientific talks emphasizing research results followed by question/answer periods. Instead, the 2006 forum was devoted largely to the development of a USWBSI cohesive action plan for the next 3-5 years — an action plan emphasizing tangible results in the national program to reduce the incidence of FHB and the most common mycotoxin produced by FHB-infected grain: deoxynivalenol, or DON (vomitoxin). “Protecting crop yield and test weight is only part of the battle against scab,” points out David Van Sanford, a University of Kentucky wheat breeder and USWBSI co-chair. “Dramatically lowering DON levels is equally as important.”

Toward that end, participants at the 2006 National Head Blight Forum spent much of their time meeting on a discipline group or commodity-based level to: (1) discuss the need for — and avenues of — increased collaboration among involved scientists, (2) develop improved performance measures for those conducting scab-related research, and (3) determine how to enhance the communication of research results and recommendations to stakeholders (e.g.,

grain growers, millers, maltsters, exporters). Representatives of each discipline* then reported back to the entire gathering, outlining their committee's main conclusions and projected action plan.

“Stakeholders are ‘holding our feet to the fire’ ” — and justifiably so, Van Sanford stated to the assembled research community. He stressed the need for useable, near-term solutions to the FHB problem. Finding and developing such solutions is critical to the viability and long-term health of the nation's wheat and barley industries, Van Sanford emphasized.

Since the December forum, USWBSI has posted the committee action plans on its web site (www.scabusa.org) and invited anyone with a stake in combating this disease to provide feedback. The second draft of the USWBSI's overall action plan is slated for completion in early March, after which the USWBSI Executive Committee will review it. The goal is to have the action plan, and a draft of the format for fiscal year 2008 research proposals, ready by late May.

- * *The discipline groups are: Variety Development & Uniform Nurseries; Chemical, Biological & Cultural Control / Etiology, Epidemiology & Disease Forecasting; Pathogen Genetics & Genomics; Genetics/Biotechnology; and Food Safety, Toxicology & Utilization of Mycotoxin-contaminated Grain.*