July 7, 2009 ***News Release***

Scab Levels Low in Great Lakes Wheat

Fusarium Head Blight (FHB) infection levels appear to be quite low in Great Lakes states wheat fields this year, according to university small grain specialists. Commonly referred to as "scab," this disease, caused by the fungus *Fusarium graminearum*, can produce significant yield losses, as well as serious grain quality issues due to the presence of the mycotoxin known as "DON" (deoxynivalenol).

A late June survey of 97 wheat fields across 21 Ohio counties showed an average scab incidence of about 3.6%, according to Ohio State University cereal grains pathologist Pierce Paul. Of the 97 inspected fields, 22 had incidence levels below 1%, with another 50 rating between 1 and 5%. Only four fields — all located in the southwestern part of the state — were higher than 10% scab incidence.

The Ohio survey also gathered information on the variety planted in each field and its level of resistance to wheat scab. "Of the 37 fields for which variety resistance data were provided, 18 were planted with moderately resistant varieties, eight with moderately susceptible varieties, and 11 with susceptible varieties," Paul reported. Average scab incidence was lowest in fields planted to moderately resistant varieties (2%). "The value of planting resistant varieties and planting wheat after soybeans instead of [after] corn or wheat is extremely important — especially in moderate to high scab years," the OSU pathologist emphasized.

To the north, Fusarium Head Blight incidence in Michigan was also low this year, remarked Michigan State University wheat breeder Janet Lewis. As of July 2nd, although FHB was observed in multiple sites, the incidence was low overall.

In Wisconsin, much of the winter wheat crop was past flowering by latter June. The FHB forecast as of June 24 indicated a low risk for the majority of the state. However, there were some production pockets in the high-risk category, noted Paul Esker, University of

Wisconsin extension field crops plant pathologist. Those areas were along Lake Michigan and in the northwestern part of the state.

A June 24 evaluation of the winter wheat variety trial at Lancaster (southwestern corner of Wisconsin) revealed only low FHB infection levels and severity, according to Esker. Updated scab readings were to be taken the following week.

Over in New York, Cornell University plant pathologist Gary Bergstrom surveyed a number of winter wheat fields across the central and western parts of the state during the third week in June. That survey, coupled with observations from extension educators and crop consultants, indicated no significant incidences of Fusarium Head Blight. "I think we can safely say that most New York wheat fields in 2009 avoided the risk of severe FHB and high DON levels," Bergstrom stated.

However, "from past experience, I know it is premature to make predictions about moderate versus low DON levels," the Cornell pathologist stated on June 22. He did expect DON accumulation in at least some winter wheat fields, based on conducive conditions for post-flowering *Fusarium* infection. "But we appear to have avoided the 'big hit' by FHB in 2009 that has severely affected some other winter wheat producing states," Bergstrom concluded.

Wheat and barley growers in all states are encouraged to visit the U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative's website — http://www.scabusa.org/ — for links to information on harvesting scabby wheat fields, testing for DON, marketing scabby grain, crop insurance adjustments for DON, and other scab-related postharvest issues.

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