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News Release

Scab Initiative Challenges Funding Elimination

The U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI) was startled and disappointed to learn, in early April, that President Obama's fiscal 2014 budget proposes the elimination of \$5 million in annual funding for the USWBSI. Initiative leaders say eliminating these funds, which have been budgeted and administered through the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS), will have a devastating impact on the national effort to control Fusarium Head Blight (scab), a serious disease plaguing wheat and barley producers and their allied industries.

USWBSI distributes the federal funds, through a competitive grant process, to scientists in 24 U.S. states. About 90% of the funding goes to researchers at land grant universities, with the other 10% to ARS scientists.

Elimination of this funding would have several consequences, USWBSI emphasizes, including:

- **Elimination of the effective federal/state/grower/industry partnership, with its substantial leveraging of state and federal research infrastructures** to address scab through a coordinated national program. Barley and wheat remain primarily public sector crops. If this work is not carried out by this partnership, it will not be conducted at an adequate level either in the private sector or through USDA.

- **Closure of four laboratories in three states (North Dakota, Minnesota and Virginia) that analyze nearly 63,000 barley and wheat grain samples annually for mycotoxin content.** Without this resource, wheat and barley researchers throughout the U.S. will be unable to determine whether future varieties will contain dangerous levels of toxins, and will be forced to terminate new research strategies to combat this threat to health safety.

- **Elimination of warning systems** that forecast when environmental conditions favor scab and provide on-line, text messages and email scab alerts to growers and industry personnel, allowing preventative measures to be taken.

“Since its establishment in the late 1990s, the Scab Initiative has proven itself as a critical force in the campaign to better understand this very serious disease and develop effective control measures for it,” states University of Kentucky wheat breeder and USWBSI co-chair Dave Van Sanford. “The monies and direction provided by the Initiative have been vital to the substantial progress that has been made. USWBSI-funded scientists have developed wheat and barley cultivars with significantly improved resistance to Fusarium Head Blight. Other researchers and extension personnel simultaneously have produced much better management information and recommendations compared to what was available several years ago.”

“This proposed elimination of funding is unjustified, based on the standard criteria used to eliminate such programs,” says Mike Davis, president of the American Malting Barley Association and a member of the USWBSI Executive Committee. “It would definitely harm the national effort to address this important disease and its effect on the economy.” The USWBSI has already absorbed a 7% cut (due to sequestration) in the funding received from USDA-ARS for fiscal 2013, he points out. Plus, the proposed fiscal 2014 termination of scab research funding is not directed at deficit reduction, Davis adds. Rather, the funds would be redirected to non-scab ARS research programs in a few states.

Stakeholders of USWBSI plan to contact congressional members from the numerous affected states to explain the importance of retaining funding for scab research.

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