

Questions raised over new hybrid

By WILLIE VOGT

A NEW corn trait approved for grain planted in the U.S. this season is getting a lot of attention this year. While industry sources worry over Agrisure RW and its lack of approvals in key export markets, farmers have snapped up hybrids with the trait, helping its maker, Syngenta Seeds, have a first-year sellout. The product, which offers another approach for controlling corn rootworm, was approved by USDA in March.

Corn with the trait would be planted on less than 0.5% of the corn acres this year, the company reports. Yet, a wide range of industry, trade, food and even transportation organizations have delivered a resounding message: "great technology, but wait for Japanese approval or take responsibility for managing the repercussions of its release."

At press time, the grain from Agrisure RW was not approved for import in any export market including Japan, Mexico, South Korea and Canada, although all are pending.

Syngenta, which has invested heavily in the technology, delivers a different message: "Why let another country's regulatory program delay our growers' use of technology," says Chuck Lee, head of Syngenta corn products. The

Key Points

- New corn trait hits market without export approval.
- Corporate owner says grain can be channeled safely.
- Industry disagrees over release of product for 2007 season.

trait developer says farmers have the ability to channel this grain and keep it out of the export market by selling it to feed users and to dry-grind ethanol plants that don't export their coproducts. Syngenta contends the market has changed thanks to rising demand for corn.

"The market has not changed," says Martin Barbre, chairman of the National Corn Growers Association Biotech Working Group. The Illinois farmer worries that putting this new trait into the field without approval by a major corn customer could hurt business. "If a grower makes a mistake with this, there will be trouble. These countries have zero tolerance [for traits that are not approved]. We aren't letting another country control our use of technology; we are delivering what our customer wants."

While Syngenta says it will sell out of hybrids with the Agrisure RW trait, in

part due to the small amount available this season, there are farmers afraid to plant the grain, according to field reports. Many are also upset that the technology is available without export market approvals.

Observers of this issue are quick to point to past biotech challenges including Starlink and others. Lee notes that Starlink was different because that product had never been approved for food use. Agrisure RW has all food and feed approvals for sale in the U.S. market.

However, Randall Gordon, vice president, communications, National Grain and Feed Association, remarks that the number of acres to be planted with Agrisure RW this year is more than was planted to Starlink. "We're still dealing with the aftermath of Starlink after, what, six years?" he says.

He adds that Syngenta has put the onus, market risk and the cost of keeping this technology out of the export market entirely on the producer and the U.S. grain handling and processing system.

At a crossroads

For Syngenta's Lee the issue at hand is about a market that must adjust for a changing tech world. "We think it's time all of us in the grain industry need to

change," he says. "If you think back a decade ago, we figured out how to work around Europe."

Syngenta's position is that every country has the right to conduct their regulatory reviews under their own terms, but the challenge this raises for U.S. agriculture is when these reviews are not synchronized with available U.S.-approved technology, growers are denied yield- and quality-enhancing products.

He says the grain industry must "step up to the plate" to meet customer demands for identity-preserved products. "If Japan wants corn without these traits fully approved in the U.S., then they should be willing to pay for that corn," Lee says.

But NGFA's Gordon counters that the industry didn't "work around" the European market — it "lost" it. Further, he says, identity-preserving grain adds costs that exporters have limited ability to pass on to foreign buyers in the highly competitive grain export market.

For growers who plant Agrisure RW this season, the world will be watching. All buyers must provide a signed stewardship form that shows they have a safe, domestic market for the grain. The trait is available from Garst, Golden Harvest and NK Brand dealers, and in demonstration trial and test plots.

Show excitement builds



Manager's Memo

By MATT JUNGSMANN

PLANS for the 2007 Farm Progress Show continue to come together well. The whole team is working hard with a number of exhibitors to put together product unveilings and improvements to make this year's show an event not to miss.

Just a few quick updates on this year's Farm Progress Show:

Concert in the works: We will look forward to hosting a country music concert featuring Tracy Lawrence and Tracy Byrd at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 29. If you are able to attend the show on Wednesday, please consider staying overnight and enjoying the show for a second day on Thursday. There are plenty of rooms available in Springfield, Bloomington and Champaign — all of which are only about a 45-minute drive from the show.

Exhibit field expansion under way: The excitement building for the 2007 Farm Progress Show can't be contained by the current layout of Progress City. In response to exhibitor turnout and expansion, we are looking forward to expanding the exhibit field by adding an 11th Street to the grid. This will accommodate new exhibitors and also those who have chosen to expand for the 2007 show. This year's show will literally be bigger and better.

Timely crop planting: A break in the weather allowed planting to occur on time for the corn and soybean demonstration fields. Special thanks to David

Brix, Marc Padruitt and Colby Schwarze, our host farmers, for their efforts in getting all of the crops planted on time and for the extra work involved in planning for the event. Also, a special thanks to Case IH, Kinze Mfg., Gromark, Trimble, Polaris, Chevrolet, Richland Community College and Great Plains for their support this spring. To stay on top of the latest crop conditions in Decatur, sign up for the newsletter listed below.

Hay Expo plans

In June, our sights turn to the Farm Progress Hay Expo on June 20-21 at Westgate, Iowa. This year's expo will be bigger and better than ever. Gates open at 9 a.m. and close at 4 p.m.

Growers familiar with the show have come to know it as the best place to see the newest innovations in action. This year is no different. The host farm, Top Deck Farms has provided a fantastic show site and a great layout to demonstrate new products.

Field demonstrations at the Farm Progress Hay Expo are always an impressive sight. The latest and greatest in haying products and technologies are on display and working in the adjacent fields. We have up to 200 acres of crops to work with during this year's event.

See Page 14 for more details.

For more information

To stay abreast of all the latest Farm Progress Show news, sign up for the "Countdown to the Farm Progress Show" e-newsletter. Go to www.farmprogressshow.com and click on the e-newsletter sign-up button located on the left side.

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