Wheat board approves record research budget

By **KAY LEDBETTER**

Key Points

- Texas Wheat Producers Board approves record-setting research budget.
- Research funds will help develop disease- and insect-resistant wheat.
- Texas board says research is essential to stay competitive in the wheat market.

The Texas Wheat Producers Board has approved a record-setting budget for research, providing more than $333,000 in funding for Texas AgriLife Research and the Texas AgriLife Extension Service projects.

Funding research projects through AgriLife Research and AgriLife Extension allows for development of disease- and insect-resistant wheat varieties that are higher yielding to ensure producer profitability into the future, according to producer-members on the board.

"We really appreciate how the Texas Wheat Producers Board interacts with the scientists," says Jackie Rudd, AgriLife Research wheat breeder in Amarillo. "Not only do they provide funding, but they give direction and clarity to our research. The wheat improvement science that we do is not some academic exercise, but has relevance in wheat production fields."

John Sweeten, AgriLife Research director in Amarillo, says the statewide small-grains Research and Extension program involves academia working closely with industry under a strategic plan guided by the Small Grains Advisory Committee.

"This is an excellent model that is available to emulate with other crops," Sweeten says. "The carefully coordinated approach has fostered reinvestments in Research and Extension capacity in terms of personnel and equipment. This involves leveraging state-appropriated dollars with industry, including the Texas Wheat Producers Board grants and royalties from certified seed sales involving Texas Foundation Seed Service at Vernon."

Investment pays

Ben Scholz, chairman of the wheat board's research appropriations committee, of Wylie, Texas, says he knows the investment in research promotion is essential to the success of wheat producers such as him.

"As producers, we don't have all the answers," Scholz notes. "We know a lot about crop production, but there is a lot left to be discovered concerning genetics, disease and insect resistance, and drought tolerance."

Despite current economic hardships, he says the funding of research projects provides a needed economic benefit to producers.

"The board feels that current research is essential for producers to remain competitive in an ever-changing global market," Scholz says. And the research funded is not just important to Texas producers, he says. Research benefits the whole world by ensuring an adequate supply of food and fiber.

Some priorities

Projects funded this year are:

- winter wheat breeding in the High Plains and Rolling Plains
- wheat breeding for hard winter wheat for South Texas and the Blacklands
- analysis of critical inputs to the profitability of soft red winter wheat in northeast Texas
- investigation of viruses vectored by the wheat curl mite
- marker-assisted selection and development of high-value, end-use quality wheat cultivars, and insect and pathogen resistance
- determination of milling and baking quality for variety selections
- evaluation of Texas wheat for tortilla production
- evaluation of alternative management practices, including no-till
- off-station wheat variety trials in multiple locations across the state

"Without this vital research," says David Cleavinger of Wildorado, a wheat board member, "diseases, viruses and pests will plague us with production shortfalls and strain out wheat producers with increased costs per bushel."

Funds for research projects are provided by the wheat checkoff program, as established by the Commodity Referendum Law. The Texas Wheat Producers Board is charged with funding research, education and market development from producer checkoff funds.

Ledbetter is with Texas A&M Agriculture Communications, Amarillo.

Texas AgriLife farm manager part of Team Borlaug in Iraq

By **BLAIR FANNIN**

AL Nelson was looking for a "challenge," but he never thought he would find himself as part of an agricultural team helping to restore Iraqi food and fiber production.

"I got into it, not knowing what to expect," says Nelson, farm manager for Texas AgriLife Research in College Station, who just spent four months in Iraq. "I went into it with an open mind, and it was an incredible experience."

Nelson and three other individuals were part of a team assembled by the Norman Borlaug Institute for International Agriculture at Texas A&M University. Team Borlaug is charged to provide recommendations to the U.S. military command and Iraqi local governments for improving agricultural production and agribusiness.

The Borlaug Institute is under contract with the U.S. Department of Defense Task Force to improve business and stability operations and serve as a resource for developing Iraqi agriculture.

Immediate needs

"We were assigned Anbar Province," Nelson says. "The main crops were wheat, barley and sheep for livestock."

Immediate needs were water, electricity and fuel to move water, Nelson notes.

"They do have resources there, but no local businesses to help the farmer get [crops] planted," Nelson says.

One of the Team Borlaug recommendations was to establish an agricultural cooperative and investigate implementing a credit system where farmers could have access to money to purchase crop inputs, he reports.

Each day, the team would conduct field activities and assess various aspects of agricultural production. At the end of the day, Borlaug team members would compile field notes and discuss solutions for addressing the problems.

Unforgettable journey

Nelson says the whole Iraqi experience was one he will never forget — from the wide variety of food to the camaraderie shared with a cross-section of people.

"I went into this knowing if I could contribute just a little bit to the effort over there, I would be doing my job," he allows. "I came away with a sense of accomplishment."

It's all part of moving forward.

"They were going to take some of our recommendations to heart, and use those recommendations to try and improve the situation there," Nelson concludes.

For more on the Borlaug Institute, go online to *borlaug.tamu.edu.*

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