

# Moving forward on

# KVD

The kernel visual distinguishability registration requirement will be a thing of the past as of this August, but only for some wheat classes. The WCWGA says that's not enough

BY CHERILYN JOLLY-NAGEL

**W**estern Canadian farmers have a proud tradition of embracing innovation. We have been the “early adopters” of new technology, whether it was air seeders, herbicide-tolerant canolas or the latest GPS equipment.

That eagerness to adopt new innovations is what has given Prairie farmers the competitive edge. However, in recent years, we have lost some of that edge because innovations are being stifled, especially in wheat. It's one of the reasons why wheat acreage in Western Canada has dropped by more than 10 million acres in the past 25 years.

One of the biggest challenges we face in introducing new wheat varieties on the Prairies is the kernel visual distinguishability (KVD) constraint.

KVD is restricting the development of new wheat varieties in Western Canada — especially in winter wheat. In the past six years, no new hard red winter wheat varieties have been supported for registration on the prairies. Several lines presented for registration have been rejected due to similarities in appearance to the CWRS classes.

Just this past February, two new winter wheat entries with improved yield, disease and agronomic traits were put forward for consideration, but were rejected because they didn't meet the strict KVD criteria, in which up to 10 kernel traits must be met.



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The KVD constraint is exasperating many public breeders and is putting a tremendous chill on private research and development in the wheat industry. According to a survey conducted by the Canadian Seed Trade Association last summer, research and development (R&D) spending on all cereals amounted to \$3.3 million or about six per cent of total spending on crop research. In contrast, canola R&D accounted for 74 per cent of the total. This lack of private sector investment in wheat is one reason why average wheat yields are stagnant while canola yields and traits leap ahead.

The poor investment climate for wheat breeding also means we are not seeing varieties being developed for new uses. That's one of the biggest problems with KVD — we don't know what we're missing. Who knows how many new varieties specifically designed for the food, feed, health or industrial (e.g. ethanol) markets could already be part of our rotations and contributing to a strong value-added farm economy.

Last year, the Canadian Grain Commission made some progress by announcing that KVD would be eliminated as a registration criterion for the minor wheat classes in August, 2008. This means that new varieties of winter wheat, CPS wheat, extra strong or white wheat can look similar to varieties in other wheat classes, so long as they don't look like CWRS or durum. While this is progress “on paper” it doesn't really get at the problem because the main reason new winter wheat varieties are rejected is because they are classified as a mix of CWRS and winter wheat kernel types.

An increasing number of farmers are growing winter wheat or expanding acreage. They are finding that winter wheat offers many

advantages, including higher yields, stretching out the harvest season, easing the spring seeding crunch (especially if you have excess moisture), and offers a better way to manage fusarium or other crop diseases. Winter wheat is a growth segment of our industry, and so we should be doing what we can to remove barriers to its further expansion.

In Ontario, the KVD criteria was removed for red wheat varieties more than 15 years ago, and was eliminated completely on white wheat varieties last spring. KVD is no longer a registration criterion in Ontario. This has led to all sorts of innovation and has contributed to the rapid increase in Ontario wheat acreage in recent years.

Here's what Jeff Reid, general manager of SeCan and a vice-president of the Canadian Seed Trade Association had to say in his testimony before the House of Commons Ag Committee more than a year ago:

*In the Ontario example, KVD restrictions were removed in 1989, and this allowed us to really innovate within the province. The industry speaks for itself on this point, in that it flourished and developed quite a broad array of new products and value-added opportunities for farmers, which have also led to increased investment downstream on the part of grain companies, food processors, and so on. All of this has decreased Ontario producers' dependency on export markets and has brought a wealth of diversity to the cropping options available to them. It has helped wheat acreage to actually increase and compete effectively with other production options, such as soybeans and corn.*

In his testimony, Reid went on to say that relaxing the KVD requirement in Ontario “has resulted in a significant increase in processing capacity and investment in Ontario. A lot of that wheat, which is being supplied to domestic mills, is now displacing wheat from Western Canada, where they are under the constraints of KVD.” Once again, Western Canadian farmers are at a disadvantage.

If there was no other way to segregate wheat varieties in our grain handling system, then you might make a case for retaining KVD. But in many other countries, they use farmer declarations. For example, in Australia, at the start of each harvest farmers declare what varieties of wheat they will be delivering. As each truckload is unloaded, a declaration is made as to the variety delivered. Grain companies do take samples and conduct random tests, however there have been extremely few instances of misrepresentation.

Likewise in Ontario, a voluntary declaration system is working well, with companies adjusting testing and compliance measures to deal with any isolated problems. These control measures quickly sort out who is honourable in their business dealings and who isn't — a competitive marketplace, where farmers and businesses are free to choose their business partners, can often be a wonderful substitute for regulatory solutions.

In Western Canada, grain companies have already introduced declaration systems in some regions to guard against the delivery of unregistered wheat varieties. Each company has introduced their own testing and control measures designed to ensure they are receiving and delivering the quality of wheat that the customer wants.

The federal government needs to move forward and take steps to remove the KVD constraint. Only then will we start to see new investment in research and development, new varieties and new market opportunities. It's one of our best bets for making it more profitable to grow wheat. ■

*Editor's note: Cheryl Jolly-Nagel is president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and farms at Mossbank, Sask.*