

# Wheat Fungus Problems May Last Into Spring

ITHACA, N.Y. — A fungal disease called scab broke out in epidemic proportions this past summer, resulting in heavy damage to the wheat crop in the Northeast, parts of the Midwest and eastern Canada.

In New York State, the disease struck numerous wheat fields with an unusual severity, according to Cornell University plant pathologist Gary C. Bergstrom.

The Cornell scientist found that nearly every one of 32 wheat fields surveyed in central and western parts of New York was under attack. "Of the fields inspected, 11 were severely infected, with estimated yield losses ranging from 10 to 30 percent," Bergstrom pointed out.

The scab epidemic also hit other wheat-growing areas of the Northeast, including western Pennsylvania. The disease also was a problem in portions of the Midwest, including Ohio, Michigan, Indiana and Illinois, as well as in eastern Canada, according to

Bergstrom.

New York State, along with Michigan and eastern Canada, is the nation's major producer of soft white winter wheat used for pastries such as cookies, cakes and crackers, with about 200,000 acres annually devoted to the production of this type of wheat.

The Cornell scientist attributed the widespread scab outbreak to prolonged periods of warm, wet conditions that prevailed during May and June when wheat plants were at the blooming stage. Bergstrom said the disease is caused by one of several species of Fusarium fungus, a group of common disease-causing organisms affecting a wide range of agricultural and ornamental crops.

Scab, more popularly known as head blight, is a common ailment, attacking wheat and other small grain crops such as oats and barley to some extent each year, but it has been years since the disease has been this severe.

Many farmers are wondering whether the disease will be as fierce and widespread next year. Bergstrom said accurate predictions are difficult to make, because it largely depends on weather conditions. But he warned that this year's epidemic could have a detrimental effect on wheat and other small-grain crops next year.

Tests conducted by scientists at Cornell's Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva showed that a large proportion of the wheat seeds being readied for fall planting did not meet germination standards. Many seeds planted in September and early October may have been infected with scab, which could affect germination as well as the health and the vigor of the plant during the winter and spring ahead.

"Marginally infected seeds may germinate, but the resultant plants may develop scab seedling blight or may later be weakened seriously by other Fusarium

diseases such as root rot and crown rot," Bergstrom said. "Therefore, the final impact of the 1986 scab epidemic may not be realized until next year."

With fall planting of winter wheat already completed in the Northeast and other winter wheat-growing areas of the nation, it's too late for growers to do anything about their wheat seeds. But those who are planning to plant spring crops such as spring wheat, oats and barley, can take certain measures to minimize the effect of scab-infected seeds on next year's crops.

Because the disease also is capable of damaging these crops, the Cornell scientist advises farmers to have their seeds checked for germination rates before spring arrives. In addition, fungicidal seed treatment for all spring grains is recommended.

Unfortunately, all small-grain varieties available commercially are susceptible to the disease, according to Bergstrom. Moreover, fungicides designed to stop scab in infected fields are unavailable, thus precluding chemical control.

## Grange Urges Land Diversion Program

MADISON, Wis. — "At stake are not only family farms but local communities and towns if farmers cannot receive a reasonable price above cost of production at the farm gate," said delegates attending the 120th annual convention of the National Grange here this week. The Grange is

urging Secretary of Agriculture Richard E. Lyng to use his discretionary authority under the Food Security Act of 1985 to implement a paid land diversion program for wheat, feed grains and soybeans with payment made in cash or in-kind at levels sufficient to attract producer participation to match supply with demand.

The Grange recognizes that at best the present agricultural program is only a stop gap plan and will not produce the help needed for agricultural producers. "Hope lies in the reduction of acres under production and the pricing of farm products to allow a reasonable profit," said the Grange.

The national farm organization also expressed concern about adding or blending foreign materials into wheat, feed grains and soybeans prior to shipment, Grange delegates adopted policy charging the Federal Grain Inspection Service with the responsibility of changing the grain standards regarding these crops and making it illegal for foreign material to be added or blended after they leave the farmers' hands.

A cautionary flag was raised by the Grange concerning the synthetic bovine growth hormone known as BGH. The Grange is requesting that the commercial introduction of BGH be delayed until sufficient data is acquired across several lactations upon which long-term projections of the effectiveness can reasonably be made.

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