

## Leading US wheat scientist gives LongReach the thumbs up



The Australian wheat breeding system is the best in the world according to internationally recognised wheat breeder and recently appointed Syngenta Fellow, Rollin “Rollie” Sears.

Rollie recently spent two weeks travelling around the Australian wheat belt at the invitation of LongReach Plant Breeders, which is part owned by AWB.

“It made a lot of sense to move varietal development from the traditional public breeding programs to the private sector. The Australian model, based on end-point royalties and wheat declarations by farmers at the point of grain delivery is probably the best model in the world”, said Rollie.

“It allows private companies to successfully invest in the wheat industry with the assurance they’ll have the opportunity to get a return on their investment”.

Rollie said the LongReach model was “quite unique”. He praised the company for managing to produce its first milling

wheat variety ‘Sentinel’ within four years of starting up.

LongReach uses contract agreements with a range of outside experts in key areas, such as the supply of germplasm, disease resistance technology and variety quality evaluation to produce wheat lines.

“There is no other model like that in the world that I know of”, said Rollie. “I am looking at the potential of this in other areas of Syngenta’s operation, particularly in the US.”

Rollie has spent close to 30 years developing Hard White Wheat varieties in the United States and is responsible for up to 50-60% of the acreage of Hard Red Winter Wheat grown in the Central Great Plains. He left his position as a distinguished professor of plant breeding at Kansas State University in 1999 to join

private plant breeder Agri-Pro Wheat. Agri-Pro later became a subsidiary of Syngenta Seeds and now markets 46 wheat varieties in the US and Canada.

LongReach Plant Breeders GM, Tony Kent, said he was delighted to have someone of Mr Sears’ calibre visit Australia to discuss the future of local wheat breeding and assist with the development of the LongReach business. “His assistance with this task will ultimately benefit Australian grain growers, through further improvement in LongReach’s performance which will result in the timely release of improved varieties”, said Tony.

Rollie’s appointment as a Senior Syngenta Fellow is a first for the seeds business and it is hoped that it will pave the way for more breeders to join the group of senior Syngenta scientists.