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A LEADING US wheat breeder says there's a lot to be gained by US and Australian breeders working together despite the two countries being fierce competitors in the world wheat market.
Australia and the US – two of the world's big five exporters – have traditionally dominated as much as 42 per cent of the global wheat trade.

Both have felt the pinch of non-traditional, low cost exporters competing for a greater slice of the pie, however remain keen competitors for several key premium markets including that of Iraq.
Dr Rollin Sears, Kansas, US, was in Australia last week at the invitation of LongReach Plant Breeders, a commercial wheat breeding venture established in 2002 between AWB and Syngenta Seeds, to inspect some trials.

In the US, Dr Sears is responsible for up to 60 per cent of the acreage of hard red wheat grown in the Central Grain Plains. He also works as a consultant to Syngenta and is assisting to produce varieties within Australia.

Despite the differences between Australian wheat varieties and those grown in the US Dr Sears said there were lessons to be learned from the two countries.
"Wheat is unlike other crops it is regionally adapted, and the varieties that are grown here have different quality parameters and are differently adapted to the wheat we grow in the US," he said.
However, Dr Sears said US winter wheat still competed directly on the international market with Australian wheat.

Most of his work has focused on red-hard wheat varieties but he did specialise in white winter wheat too - notably a segment the US was now investing considerable breeding and production efforts in as it strove to win over some of Australia's traditional hard white wheat markets.

Dr Sears said although wheat was regionally adapted to different areas much of the technology between different varieties was comparable.

He said his visit to Australia was to review some of the technology.
"From my perspective there are lots of traits for rust resistance, and tolerance to nematodes that the Australians have been leaders in," he said.

Stripe rust was considered a significant problem for NSW wheat growers during the past few seasons and Dr Sears said it was just one issue that could be tacked through plant breeding.
"We know that some genes are more stable in terms of their resistance to stripe rust and stem rust," he said.

Dr Sears said by identifying those genes and understanding them better they could be put into packages to strive towards a solution to combat rust.
AgriTech Crop Research managing director, Peter Hamblin, Young managed the LongReach trial sites in NSW, which assessed various traits in Whistler, Wylah and Diamondbird wheats, including pest and disease tolerance.

Mr Hamblin said there were trials at Parkes, Grenfell, Young, Junee, Beckom and Lockhart.
The site at the Warakiri property, "Englefield Plains", Junee Reefs spanned six hectares and included more than 4000 different plots.

Improved seasonal conditions and good spring rainfall meant that the trials were looking good.
"The seasonal prospects are better than they have been in the last few years," he said.
"It is good to get a good year to see how they perform under normal conditions," Mr Hamblin said.

Ends.