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News Release

Producers' Input Key in Scab Management Survey

Ultimate Goal: To Better Assist Growers & Buyers of Grain in Reducing Risk of Economic Losses to Scab

More than 16,000 farmers in 17 states are receiving a mailed survey in late February focusing on the adoption — or lack thereof — of best management practices for the control of Fusarium Head Blight (FHB), or scab. The survey is a project of the U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI), which contracted with the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) to formulate survey questions, conduct the mailing, perform follow-up phone calls and tally the data. The survey results will be delivered to USWBSI by June 30.

“Despite the development of various powerful tools for scab management, scab outbreaks remain an annual fact of life in the U.S., and it is simply a question of which region(s) of the country will be damaged in any given year,” notes Christina Cowger, North Carolina-based USDA-Agricultural Research Service plant pathologist and organizer of the survey. “Adoption of the full slate of scab management techniques is fragile, uneven and partial — particularly in the soft wheat region.” The passage of a year or two without significant scab in a region tends to make the issue recede in the minds of producers and crop advisors, she points out, and the degree of adoption correspondingly drifts downward.

“We want to learn how to better help producers and their advisors reduce scab,” Cowger emphasizes. “The survey will help us determine to what extent scab management practices are being [utilized] in each of the states — and what

are the main barriers to implementing those practices.” Some questions address the size of the farming operation, market class(es) of grains produced and the major varieties grown. Other survey questions deal with the use of forecasting websites, employment of fungicides for disease management and where producers obtain their information about scab management.

The answers will be analyzed at various relevant levels (e.g., nationally, by market class, by region, etc.) and will be shared with crop specialists in each of the surveyed states. (All answers are anonymous; there is no identifying information about any respondent.) “The data will let us know which tools growers are using to manage scab, and what problems they encounter when using those tools,” state USWBSI co-chairs David Van Sanford and Art Brandli in an introductory letter to survey recipients. “We can then better assist growers and buyers of grain in reducing the risk of economic losses to scab.”

Producers who do not respond to the mailed survey by March 17 will be contacted by NASS surveyors to arrange for a telephone interview. Again, responses are completely confidential, as required by law, stress Van Sanford and Brandli. The USWBSI co-chairs strongly encourage wheat and barley producers to participate in this special survey, as producers are the ones whom it is intended to ultimately benefit.

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For more information, please contact: *Sue Canty, Manager
U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative
Networking & Facilitation Office
Phone: 517-355-0271, Ext. 1183
Email: scabusa@scabusa.org*

