

New potential with rye hybrids

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MEDICINE HAT — A price of \$17 per bushel for rye likely sounds pretty good to most farmers.

True, it was a price paid for a small quantity in Ohio, for use as a cover crop, but it indicates a rise in popularity for a crop whose popularity in Western Canada has waned from highs in the 1950s.

Agriculture Canada research scientist Jamie Larsen is bullish on rye. He told growers at the Oct. 27 Farming Smarter seminar about the \$17 per bu. price but also about burgeoning opportunities for the crop.

American farmers are using fall rye for cover cropping in soybeans and corn. It reduces nutrient runoff, controls weeds and erosion and contributes to soil health.

Larsen sees U.S. cover crop activity as a good market for Canadian rye.

"I really don't see why, here in Western Canada, we can't meet that demand," he said, noting a steady increase in exports.

As well, marketing options would likely develop if more rye is grown on a regular basis.

Larsen's recent focus has been on hybrid fall rye, and he presented data on three years of trials at 15 locations per year. Trials involved yield monitoring of hybrid versus open pollinated varieties of fall rye.

Another set of trials was designed to gauge response rates of hybrid and open pollinated varieties to intensive versus conventional crop management.

"We're seeing typically anywhere between ... 25 to 40 percent increase in yield over open pollinated varieties, so that's pretty impressive. You can see why people are interested."

Two hybrid varieties, Brassetto and Guttino, are registered, and a third, Bono, has interim registration.

Larsen said trials showed the hybrids had a larger seed size, higher kernel weight, more kernels per spike and more fertile tillers.

"When you put all that together, you get grain yield."

Fall rye was once an important rotational crop for weed control, but acreage in Western Canada declined with the availability of herbicides and the arrival of canola and pulses.

Fewer acres limited marketing options. However, hybrids and market potential now hold re-newed promise for the crop.

"The yield potential of rye is really phenomenal," he said.