

Media Release
January 19, 2009

World record attempt hopes pinned on new wheat cultivar

New wheat cultivar Wakanui is the secret weapon in a Mid Canterbury farmer's bid for a place in the Guinness Book of Records.

Craige Mackenzie has grown an exceptional crop of feed wheat and thinks it is worth comparing to the best in the world. Next month, he will attempt to break the world record for the heaviest wheat crop per hectare, currently set at 15.36 t/ha.

Wakanui is a proprietary wheat variety originating from lines introduced by Sejet Plant Breeding in Denmark to Plant and Food Research in Lincoln through a long-standing collaboration.

The cultivar was selected and developed for New Zealand conditions by Plant and Food Research's collaborative Feed Grains Development Programme (led by PFR breeder Andy Hay) with Winslow-owned former Ashburton Grain Consolidators (now incorporated into Canterbury Seed) and Luisetti Seeds.

Plant and Food agronomist Ross Hanson said since its release three years ago Wakanui was consistently topping the tables in yield, both in trials and in the field after its commercial release last year.

Mackenzie is quietly confident. He is impressed with the variety's strong results and yield potential.

Its robust nature meant farmers could use fewer chemicals like fungicides and growth regulator, a positive environmental as well as cost effective development, he said.

"Good farming is about limiting the input without limiting the yield."

Cooler weather over summer is helping maximise grain fill but the next few weeks will be critical to whether the mid-February 10ha harvest makes the Guinness Book of Records or not.

A Welshman in Southland currently holds the world record, although the coveted title is likely to be contested this year by several wheat growers.

Mackenzie took agriculturalists involved in the Wakanui variety's development to inspect the crop last week.

Hanson pointed out the large number of ears that contained a rare 5 grains across, against a standard of 3 – 4 grains.

Plant & Food Research plant breeder Andy Hay said working with countries like Denmark enabled New Zealand breeders and farmers access to a wide range of genetics. Ironically, Wakanui was currently in trials back in Denmark, based on its stellar performance here.

Mackenzie emphasised the world record attempt was not about a single performer but about highlighting Canterbury's world class arable industry and proving the team's agronomic skills.

Canterbury Seed grain general manager Chris Thomas said the success of Plant & Food Research's cultivars such as Wakanui, bred and trialled for New Zealand conditions, showed that it was not only the traditional UK-bred feed wheats that would do well here.

Luisetti Seeds Manager Vincent Luisetti said Wakanui seed would be available for New Zealand farmers to grow this autumn.

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Field of dreams . . . agriculturalists inspect Craige Mackenzie's potentially record-breaking crop of Wakanui feed wheat in Mid Canterbury.

From left: Plant & Food Research's plant breeder Andy Hay, Plant & Food Research agronomist Ross Hanson, Plant & Food Research Crop Seed Manager Ivan Lawrie, Luisetti Seeds Manager Vincent Luisetti, Craige Mackenzie and Sejet representative Birger Eriksen.
(PHOTO CREDIT: John McCaw)