



# Wheat Producers Committed to Protecting Midge-Tolerant Technology

Midge tolerance and beneficial insects are proving to be a powerful one-two punch.

**PRODUCERS VALUE MIDGE**-tolerant wheat varieties and they are committed to protecting the long-term future of the technology.

That's the overwhelming message emerging from a survey of producers who used the technology on their farms in 2012, explains Todd Hyra, a member of the Midge Tolerant Wheat Stewardship Team. Almost 93 per cent of producers surveyed agree that it's critical to have a stewardship program in place to ensure the effective life of the midge-tolerant gene is protected.

"Producers deserve a big thank-you. They really are doing their part to preserve the technology," says Hyra who is also business manager for SeCan in Western Canada. He notes that the percentage of producers who believe stewardship is critical to safeguarding the technology has increased every year since the survey was first conducted in 2010.

The Midge Tolerant Wheat Stewardship Team is a broad industry coalition representing plant breeders, government, seed growers, seed distributors and producer groups. The team is committed to maintaining the viability of midge-tolerant wheat by educating western Canadian wheat producers on the importance of proper stewardship of the technology.

It took more than 15 years and a huge financial investment for researchers to move a single gene for midge tolerance, *Sm1*, into spring wheat varieties to protect plants against the pest. "We've talked to a lot of producers who are realizing the incredible value of not having to be out in their fields scouting and spraying for midge," says Hyra.

There's also early evidence that suggests midge-tolerant varieties are playing a role in reducing midge pressure. Over the last 20 years, northeastern Saskatchewan has been the hotbed of midge pressure, but levels have declined in this area over the past two years. "It could be a cycle, but there is evidence that for producers planting midge-tolerant varieties, reduced spraying is having a positive impact on beneficial parasitic wasps, which work to keep midge populations in check," says Hyra. "Midge tolerance and beneficial insects are packing a pretty strong one-two punch."

The Midge Tolerant Wheat Stewardship Team will be working hard again this year to increase awareness of the need for technology stewardship, explains Mike Espeseth, communications

manager for the Western Grains Research Foundation. "There really is no plan B. The midge-tolerant varieties we have now are dependent on the *Sm1* gene and so will future varieties. That's why it's so important to protect the technology for the future."

In the next few years, producers will see many new strong-performing wheat varieties with midge tolerance emerge from the research pipeline, including the first-ever midge-tolerant durum wheat.

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Hyra notes that significant midge pressure in the Peace River area in 2013 is yet another reason to safeguard midge-tolerant technology. Some fields were devastated, with reports of yield losses in the 50 per cent range. "There have been hints of the pest in the past, but not to this level. Midge really wasn't on the radar for producers in Peace River last year."

But that's about to change. For the 2014 season, midge-tolerant varieties will be freighted into the region; longer term, local seed growers will start to produce seed that will help control the midge population.

*Editor's Note: This article has been brought to you by the Midge Tolerant Wheat Stewardship Team, a broad industry coalition representing plant breeders, government, seed growers, seed distributors and producer groups.*