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Breeding the cream of the crop

As it implements the next stage of its business plan, WA crop breeding company InterGrain is seeking to further strengthen its commercial viability.

InterGrain chief executive Bryan Whan recently revealed that the company had recruited several key wheat breeding personnel who were previously employed by the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA).

He said this intake had completed InterGrain's transition from a State-based breeding program to a fully commercial breeding entity.

Established in October, 2007, by the State Government and the Grains Research and Development Corporation, InterGrain's commercial intent was to transfer the cereal breeding activities of DAFWA from a government-based operation to a commercial company structure.

Benefits perceived at the time were that it would free WA's wheat breeding program from the policy and political restrictions of government and enable it to operate in a competitive commercial environment.

Highly successful to date, InterGrain varieties now occupy 80 per cent of the area sown in WA to wheat and 92 per cent sown to barley.

Dr Whan said its commercial structure had enabled InterGrain to be more innovative, flexible and compete in a business field that included rapidly evolving technologies, production and marketing sectors.

A key InterGrain objective was to provide a market-driven approach

with a more balanced mix of government, industry and commercial partners. It is a venture that ultimately needs to be self-funding.

As the business plan has developed, InterGrain has expanded the scope of its wheat and barley breeding to the whole of Australia rather than having a sole focus on WA — as what existed with DAFWA.

"We now have wheat and barley breeding programs with Australia-wide field testing," Dr Whan said.

He added that this had enabled the company to not only develop cereal varieties well adapted to WA conditions, but also evaluate which of its varieties were suited to Victoria, central and southern New South Wales, the southern Eyre Peninsula, the mallee of South Australia and Victoria and the south-east of SA.

InterGrain varieties currently in commercial production are providing benchmarks for the industry.

Wyalkatchem and Magenta are among the highest-yielding APW wheats. Bonnie Rock is a benchmark for AH quality.

In addition, the Binu, Yandanooka and Fortune varieties set the benchmark worldwide for wheats suited to the Japanese white salted udon noodle market.

InterGrain biscuit varieties, including Bullaring, are considered to be among the best in the world for sweet biscuit and cake production.

Baudin barley is currently one of the leading export malting-quality barleys in the world, with excellent

malt extract and diastase. It is also regarded as a barley that is well-suited to shochu production in Japan and is replacing Stirling, the previous benchmark variety for that end-use.

Gairdner barley is widely grown across Australia as a malting variety that is popular with both the domestic and export markets.

Dr Whan said under the new company structure, InterGrain had been able to take on business partners such as Nuseed, resulting in more innovative and widespread variety commercialisation.

In the past two years, InterGrain and Nuseed have been instrumental in setting up the on-line trading site Seedpool; at www.seedpool.com.au.

It is an online list of producers who have grown InterGrain wheat varieties.

They can then be contacted directly so that farmer-to-farmer trading can happen more easily.

Seedpool is a free service and by helping minimise the cost for growers to get into new varieties, it also helps to hasten the adoption rate of superior varieties.

It is a win-win situation, according to Dr Whan who said that the commercialisation of InterGrain had reinvigorated local crop breeding for the benefit of all Australian cereal growers.

He said it had already demonstrated that it could open up exciting new opportunities and hasten the adoption of superior germplasm.



The InterGrain group: the company is seeking to strengthen its commercial viability