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# Japanese millers strong on noodle wheat

By COLIN BETTLES

DURING a brief tour of Australia recently, Japanese flour millers delivered a strong message about the noodle wheat varieties they want WA growers to produce.

The delegation toured the country as guests of Riverina Australia; inspecting the company's east coast office, Queensland flour mills, its Subiaco office and CBH's Kwinana Grain Terminal.

They also met with Grain Pool and several local graingrowers to discuss their desired wheat traits and on-farm production methods.

The delegation comprised representatives from the Nitto Fuji Flour Milling Company and the Masuda Flour Mill.

The mills are part of a group of companies owned by global giant Mitsubishi Corporation; of which Riverina is also a subsidiary.

They use Australian wheat varieties, including Australian Prime Hard (APH), Australian Premium White (APW) and Australian Noodle Wheat (ANW) and Australian Standard White (ASW).

The Nitto Fuji Flour Milling Company has four flour mills in Japan and another in Vietnam.

Between them, the five mills consume about 400,000 tonnes of wheat each year, with 20 per cent sourced from Australian growers, mostly from WA.

They use ASW and a blend of APW and noodle wheat, to make flour for making Udon noodles and instant Raman noodles; products that are extremely popular with Japanese consumers.

The Masuda Flour Mill is located in the Kobe area, mid-west of Japan, and mostly uses soft wheat varieties.

Speaking through Riverina Australia General Manager Koichi Tojo as his interpreter, Masuda Flour Mill assistant general manager of production Hajime Okada said his mill also grinds a small amount of ASW, but also wants to secure a reliable supply of soft wheat from WA growers.

The Masuda Flour Mill uses about 40,000t of US Western White (WW) per year.

However, if WA soft wheat is better in price and quality than WW, Mr Okada said they would start using the locally

grown product and would pay a premium for it.

"Because they are a small consumer of soft wheat, which is quite different to ASW, they would like to find out if there's any soft wheat in WA suitable for their production," he said.

"They have only bought noodle wheat from WA before, (for about 40 years), and would now like to explore opportunities to purchase soft wheat in the future."

The delegation also raised a catch-22 dilemma for the WA grains industry.

The flour millers have sampled and tested new noodle wheat varieties Binnu, Yandanooka and Fortune and prefer them to WA's main noodle wheat variety, Calingiri, because they perform better for noodle making.

However, some WA growers say the new varieties are not yielding any better than Calingiri, and are reluctant to make a shift in the paddock.

In January 2009, CBH's grain marketing arm, Grain Pool, and WA wheat breeding company, InterGrain, announced a closed loop marketing strategy aimed at ensuring the future of the premium Udon noodle wheat market for WA growers.

The partnership saw co-ordinated marketing arrangements for the three varieties by providing Grain Pool with an exclusive export licence for the varieties.

At the time, InterGrain chief executive Dr Bryan Whan said the strategy's primary objective was to revive noodle wheat premiums for growers, by ensuring a continuous supply of preferred WA noodle wheat varieties to satisfy market demands.

Through Mr Tojo, Nitto Fuji Flour Milling Company production technology general manager Takao Ariyama said he relied on WA growers to supply noodle wheat varieties that performed well in the mills.

Mr Ariyama said the millers were impressed by the consistent supply and quality of the WA wheat crop over the years and wanted it to continue.

However, he said they were now concerned by the continued use of Calingiri and failure to adopt Binnu, Yandanooka and Fortune.

"Flour millers have become concerned in recent times about the inferi-

or quality of a specific noodle variety grown in WA," he said.

"They have also heard a whisper around about the consistent supply of noodle wheat out of WA.

"They have been told that growers produced less volumes of noodle wheat last year and that was a big concern.

"They also heard a story about the new varieties of noodle wheat and what growers think of them.

"They are concerned some growers don't like these new varieties of noodle wheat, and are worried that will contribute to their supply from WA down the track."

Riverina Australia grower services manager Jeff Bruce said WA growers were reluctant to "throw out" Calingiri because it yielded extremely well in local conditions.

"Although the price is not being paid for Calingiri at the moment, growers are still reluctant to throw it out because it yields well and is very well suited to WA growing conditions," he said.

"A few growers are worried that these new varieties will not yield as well as Calingiri has done in the past.

"But the dilemma is; the millers don't like Calingiri as much as these new varieties."

Mr Bruce said a transitional program could be used to stimulate grower confidence in the new varieties.

Mr Ariyama said if WA growers produced higher quality wheats, with specific traits for noodle production, they would be prepared to pay a premium for them.

He said a new domestic Japanese wheat variety was also in the pipeline that threatened to out-perform Calingiri in terms of noodle production.

However, it was still passing through the appraisal stage.

The delegation said they also approved of the CBH Better Farm IQ program.

"This is a very good thing for the growers and for us as an end user," Mr Ariyama said.

He said the delegation's general impression of Australia was surprise at the large size of the farms.

They said the CBH grain terminal at Kwinana was also much bigger than



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they expected.

Mr Tojo said the tour was groundbreaking because it helped relay an important message, direct from the flour millers to the farmers, about the type of wheat varieties they need for end use.

"In the past with the single desk system managed by AWB, the millers have not had much of a chance to interact directly with Australian farmers, and in

return the farmers have not had much chance to talk with the end users," he said.

"Now the flour millers can express their interests to the Australian grains industry, and farmers, directly, and from that interaction everyone is in a better position to understand each other's interests.

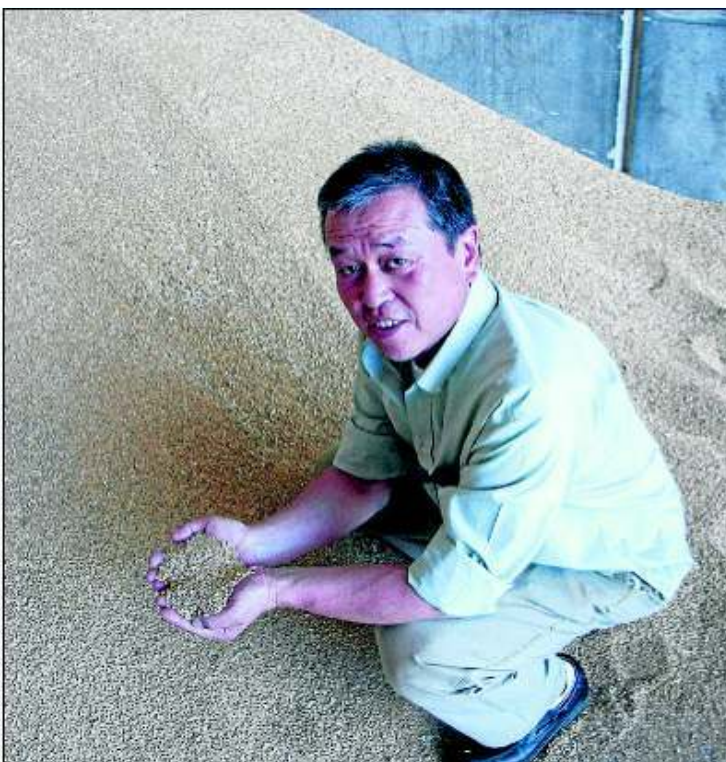
"Sometimes, it is difficult for cus-

tomers to express their interests to producers and understand their requirements effectively unless it's done on a face-to-face basis.

"But these kinds of direct interactions are good for everyone and need to happen more frequently in future, not just on this one occasion but a series of interactions, which we'd like to organise continuously with many other clients."



□ The Japanese flour milling delegation stopped at the farm of Wongan Hills growers Mike and Anthony Sadler on their Australian tour last week, accompanied by staff from Riverina Australia's VVA office.



□ Masuda Flour Mill assistant general manager of production Hajime Okada said his mill would start using VVA grown soft wheat products if there was a regular supply, and would be prepared to pay a premium for it.