

Triticale: its place in agriculture, and marketing

K.V. Cooper

Department of Plant Science, Waite Campus, University of Adelaide.
Glen Osmond, S.A. 5064

To be successful, a new crop, such as triticale, may have to occupy different niches in different environmental, economic and political situations around the world. Generally a new crop must be adapted to whichever climatic or soil condition(s) pose a problem for existing crops, be required to produce whichever product is lacking locally, or in a particular season, or provide a quick solution to a new government policy e.g. enable a reduction in agrochemical use.

In Australia triticale is generally treated as a crop for land problematic for the profitable production of wheat, barley, and to a lesser extent, oats. There is a lot of such land about: millions of hectares of acid, waterlogged, sandy, boron toxic, trace-element deficient or cereal cyst nematode infested soil. Recent work indicates that adaptation to all these conditions can be developed in triticale, given a reasonable breeding effort (1). Marginal lands aside, the value of triticale as a disease break or erosion control measure to increase the sustainability of farming regimes should not be under-estimated. Currently the best resistance to cereal cyst nematode available in a cereal (and coupled with excellent tolerance), is obtained in the cultivar "Tahara", and the superior early vigour, soil binding and weed controlling capacity of triticale is rapidly being appreciated.

Whatever agronomic benefits a new crop may have, it will not be adopted unless appropriate markets are developed. In Australia triticale is gaining acceptance as a high quality feed grain, competing well against feed-grade barley, sorghum and oats. Its popularity rose prior to and fell subsequent to the deregulation of the wheat market. A recent commitment of the Australian Wheat Board to receive triticale in South Australia has seen the area sown to triticale in that State double. The current surplus of feed grains following the problematic 1992/93 season is likely to provide a huge setback for the continued growth of demand for triticale, and this emphasises the necessity of developing a reliable export market for this crop.

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References

1. Cooper. K.V. 1991. Proc 2nd International Triticale Symposium. CIMMYT. Mexico D.F. 188-195.