

Wheat boost Larger grain size, good test weight

New start for durum

By **PAULA THOMPSON**

THERE is one grain bucking the falling price trends this season – durum wheat.

Many croppers have moved away from the niche crop in recent years because of comparable returns for bread wheat, and quality issues such as screenings.

But a release at Hart Field Day on Tuesday should lead to more interest in growing the crop again.

At the state's premier cropping event, the University of Adelaide's durum breeding program leader Jason Able released DBA-Aurora, which he said promised a step-change in potential durum production in southern Australia.

He said the new variety offered improved quality, particularly in lowering the levels of screenings.

"With more than five years of advanced trial field work, DBA-Aurora has consistently shown

yield potential that is as good or better than the highest-yielding, commercially available durum varieties across Australia," Dr Able said.

"But its most notable features are an improved disease resistance package, larger grain size, good test weight, early vigour and weed competitiveness when compared with other high-yielding durum varieties."

And prices look set to reward growers who have stuck with

the crop.

At the moment, there is a \$160/t premium for DR1 grade over bread wheat.

Even lower-quality durum, a DR2, is fetching a \$120/t premium over bread wheat.

"The input costs aren't that different between durum and bread wheat, so there are very strong gross margins at that price," Dr Able said.

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Aurora heralds

By **PAULA THOMPSON**

GRAIN prices have weakened significantly throughout the season on the back of strong worldwide production.

But the one grain bucking the trend is durum wheat.

And with the release of a new durum variety at the Hart Field Day this week, it is expected farmers will look at the crop with more interest next season.

While issues with screenings had caused some croppers to move away from growing durum in recent years, the University of Adelaide's durum breeding program leader Jason Able said improved quality in the new variety – DBA-Aurora – looked set to bolster potential durum production in southern Australia.

"The amount of screenings is an important attribute of DBA-Aurora over other durum varieties," he said.

"It averages less than 5 per cent screenings.

"We've had issues with varieties such as Yawa, which tend to go over

Key points

- New variety offers yield boost
- Screenings average less than 5pc
- Strong returns for durum

5pc for screenings, but this new variety should mitigate against that risk."

Durum was set to reward growers who had stuck with the crop this season.

"The spread at the moment is \$428 a tonne for DR1 versus \$260/t for bread wheat," Dr Able said.

"Even with DR2 at \$380/t, the spread is quite high.

"Also, the input costs aren't that different between durum and bread wheat, so there are very strong gross margins at that price."

DBA-Aurora, named after the Roman goddess of the dawn, was high yielding with improved quality and robustness.

Dr Able said it was already attracting considerable interest from the global pasta manufacturing industry.

"DBA-Aurora heralds a new begin-



a high-yielding durum

ning for the Australian durum industry with many superior attributes over commercially-grown varieties, including Hyperno, Saintly, Tjilkuri, Yawa and WID802 in the southern region (SA and Vic)," he said.

"With over five years of advanced trial fieldwork, DBA-Aurora has consistently shown yield potential that is as good as or better than the highest yielding, commercially available durum varieties across Australia. But its most notable features are an improved disease resistance package, larger grain size, good test weight, early vigour and weed competitiveness when compared to the other high-yielding durum varieties."

Dr Able said the new variety would overcome concerns about possible quality downgrades and weed competition, and improve durum's fit into farming rotations.

"DBA-Aurora is a more robust durum that is better suited to an integrated weed management system, and less likely to be downgraded for small grain under a tight spring finish with minimal rainfall," he said.

Dr Able said that there was already demand for the new variety from the university's industry partner, San Remo Macaroni Pty Ltd, and other pasta manufacturers.

"I've just recently returned from Italy where I had preliminary discussions with Italian pasta giants Barilla and Divella. They clearly signalled that they want to buy durum from the southern regions of Australia," he said.

"It is now in the hands of growers and exporters to meet that demand."

"These companies openly acknowledge we produce some of the best durum in the world. What they need though is the availability of a consistent export supply. DBA-Aurora will hopefully signal the start of increased opportunities for growers and exporters beyond that needed by San Remo and other local end-users."

Depending on this season and the way it finishes, as much as 1000t of DBA-Aurora would be available for sale through the Southern Australian Durum Growers Association to sow in 2015.

Behind the headline

DURUM is a crop that has seen a lot of ups and downs in the past few years. There was a time, only a few years back, when it was fetching more than \$600 a tonne, but high global production in the past few years has forced prices down. This year, with challenging conditions in key growing areas such as Italy and France, prices have come back up. Issues with quality have also caused croppers to turn away from the crop in the past few seasons. Problems with delivery and a high percentage

of screenings meant croppers were not willing to take a risk sowing the crop, particularly when bread wheat returns were so strong. But, with this week's release of DBA-Aurora, which promises a much improved quality profile, growers should be able to look at increasing the acreage next season. Durum pioneer Tony Rathjen passed away this year, but growers say he would be pleased to see the industry he loved moving forward to a brighter future.