



Looking ahead with Hybrid Wheat

Over the past three years we have had the opportunity to explore Saaten Union's plant breeding centre at Estrées-St-Denis, north of Paris, as well the UK trials site at Cowlinge near Newmarket.

Each visit has revealed exciting details about the development of hybrids, we have seen new research facilities and learnt about innovative technologies. In this update we touch on the latest news and look ahead at the longer term vision and the means of achieving it.

Sales trends

Since 2008 Saaten Union's sales of Hybrid Wheat have increased by 15% per year. A quarter of a million ha were grown in Europe in 2012 and the company aims to continue the present rate of growth to 2016 and beyond. The French market continues to expand with 200,000 ha now grown but the UK is also a priority market.

Progress is being made in Eastern Europe and plans are underway for other continents. In France Saaten Union is increasing staff levels so that more farms can multiply Hybrid Wheat to ensure demand is met.

The growth in commercial production is not only being fuelled by new growers but also, according to the company's customer research, by increased confidence among existing users. Notably, fewer farmers are stopping growing Hybrid Wheat. The yield advantage is currently averaging 0.9 tonnes/ha in France with 58% getting over 1 tonne/ha more than their on-farm average for conventional varieties.

Hystar remains the predominant Hybrid variety but new varieties are coming forward, from very early to late. These are being evaluated for the UK market.



Left: The latest trials plot harvester in the Estrees fleet.

Above right: The new Estrees research facility includes equipment for baking quality analysis.



Visionary research programme

Development of Hybrid Wheat varieties is accelerating. Overall 15 Hybrid varieties are currently in listing trials in nine countries, including one in the UK. In France six new Hybrids were listed in 2012.

The breeding programme is being accelerated through the use of genetic markers and research on polyploids, which provide added potential for stress resistance and increased vigour.

Further research is being carried out to improve the performance of the hybridising agent - Croisor - and the chemistry of the hybridising system. Further down the production line a high tech optical sorter has been installed to help maximise seed quality. We will report in more detail on some of these projects over the coming months.

We are currently creating a Hybrid Wheat photo gallery on the CROPCO website. The gallery is available to anyone preparing marketing or presentation material. For further details visit www.hybridwheat.co.uk