

## Grain Gains & Innovation Ale – WCI’s Summer Round-Up

Western Crop Innovations Newsletter Vol. III: August 2024



### Message from the Board of Directors

The Interim Board of WCI extends its heartfelt thanks to our staff for their remarkable efforts during the transition period that began in April. While there is still work ahead, we are pleased to report that most of the heavy lifting is complete. We also want to express our gratitude to Olds College for their cooperation, Alberta Agriculture and Irrigation for their support, and our numerous suppliers for helping to expedite the establishment of our independent business model.

Our Directors had the pleasure of attending WCI’s area at AgSmart and were highly impressed by the condition of our plots and the quality of our “Innovation Ale.” It was an excellent opportunity to engage with stakeholders and discuss our shared vision for WCI.

Additionally, we had a productive lunch meeting with Minister R.J. Sigurdson, alongside Interim Executive Director Mark Olson. We are grateful for his continued support and personal interest in our organization.

We would also like to acknowledge our other core funder, RDAR, as well as our member organizations: Alberta Grains, Alberta Beef Producers, SeedNet, and the Saskatchewan Barley Development Commission. We want to remind potential industry partners that we are here to address gaps in agricultural research. As the only truly independent crop research organization in Western Canada, we have the capability to adapt to industry needs -- an example being our recent proposal to take on the Regional Variety Trials for silage in collaboration with the Alberta Seed Processors.

It was wonderful to connect with so many industry partners and friends at our recent Townhall. We welcome your feedback and encourage you to reach out anytime at [board@westerncropinnovations.com](mailto:board@westerncropinnovations.com).



## Feature Update: AgSmart 2024



Staff of WCI. Photographer: Marc Zienkiewicz, Seed World Group

WCI is celebrating another successful year at AgSmart! We want to thank everyone who stopped by to visit us during the expo. In the field, we showcased 23 plots of barley, 16 plots of triticale, a pathology demonstration, and breeding demonstrations for barley and triticale that walked visitors through the 10-year breeding process in just 10 minutes!



In our tent space, we highlighted work from the biotechnology, pathology, and quality labs, including malt samples from our new micromalt lab. Of course, the major draw to the tent was our feature beer of the year, Innovation Ale. Brewed with a blend of malts from WCI's Lowe and AB BrewNet varieties, this medium-bodied, crisp, and refreshing beer was a hit! A special thanks to SeedNet for supplying the BrewNet malt for this project.

Over the two-day event, WCI delivered six crop plot presentations and participated in a panel discussion hosted by the Alberta Seed Guide. On the second day, we took part in the Alberta Crop Diagnostics Day, a collaboration between AgSmart, Alberta Grains, Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Alberta Pulse Growers, and the Canola Council of Canada. Additionally, we had the opportunity to host nearly seventy stakeholders, collaborators, and industry partners on tours of the new micromalt plant, located on the Olds College campus.

We fielded insightful questions and engaged meaningfully with visitors from both within the industry and the producer community. AgSmart marked WCI's first public-facing producer extension event since our transition to a not-for-profit organization, and our staff did a wonderful job representing the fresh face of the company.





## Recent Activities

### Field Notes

WCI breeders and technical staff have been hard at work screening lines in the field. They are collecting data on key agronomic traits, including heading, height, lodging, and disease resistance, among others. Advanced breeding lines are being described and subjected to roguing to remove off-types, a crucial step in the seed purification process. Breeders are also busy making selections for headrow lines advancing to next year's Yield 1 trials.



### Harvest

Alberta has faced an exceptionally dry and hot year, setting what may be the record for the earliest start to harvest in our breeding program's history. Harvest of silage tests and head picking have both been completed. Headrow binding and plot combining began the week of August 5<sup>th</sup> and are ongoing.

### In the Lab

Our quality lab is preparing for the analysis of incoming material by updating NIR calibrations and setting up the new wet chemistry lab. Biotechnology efforts continue with analysis of project data, testing of new genetic markers, and end-of-season UAV flights. Additionally, our pathology team is wrapping up disease surveys in producers' fields and completing evaluations at our field sites and in the disease nursery at CDC North.

## Extension & Knowledge Transfer

### Tours

We've welcomed numerous visitors to our fields and facilities over the past month! Notable guests included representatives from Alliance Seed, Canterra Seeds, Carleton University, FP Genetics, and the Western Grains Research Foundation (WGRF). In addition to the tours conducted during AgSmart, we also hosted a micromalt tour for attendees of the Alberta Regional Variety Advisory Committee (ARVAC) general meeting, held on August 1st at the Olds College campus.

### Industry Meetings

Late last month, scientists Yadeta Kabeta (Barley Breeding) and Jennifer Zantinge (Biotechnology) traveled to Saskatoon for meetings with the Canada Barley Association and the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (SCAP).

We also extend our thanks to Red Shed Malting for inviting us to this year's Distillers Meeting. Our staff gained valuable insights into the industry and learned a great deal from the experience!



## Field Day Appearances

Members of our team participated in several field day events in the recent weeks:

- **Ag in Motion**, with plots featured at SeedNet's exhibit, July 16-18
- **Variety Tour** hosted by Stamp Seeds in Enchant, July 25
- **Cut the Crop Field Day** hosted by the Gateway Research Organization in Westlock, August 7
- **MARA Plot Tour** hosted by the Mackenzie Applied Research Association (MARA) in Fort Vermillion, August 9
- **Producer Appreciation Day** hosted by Canada Malting in Niobe, August 16



## Quarterly Stakeholder Meeting

Our second stakeholder town hall was held on Thursday, August 15. We were very pleased with the turnout, and want to express our thanks to attendees for taking the time during this busy season to participate! We look forward to the next meeting, to be scheduled for November.

## Call for Additional Partnerships

WCI is actively seeking additional funding support. Our organization has implemented a tiered membership model that not only grants voting rights in the election of board members, but also provides the opportunity to influence our strategic plan. As WCI will begin drafting a new business plan in September, now is the ideal time to become a member!

## Project Progress

WCI has submitted two project proposals since our July newsletter! In collaboration with Global Institute for Food Security (GIFS), the project 'Applying genomic selection to enhance yield, lodging and disease resistance, and breeding efficiency in feed barley variety development' would see an expansion of genomic selection applied to the barley breeding program. This is a three-year project proposed to begin April 1, 2025.

The second project proposal, 'The need for feed - Silage RVTs v2.0' would see WCI coordinate the silage RVTs, in collaboration with Alberta Seed Processors. This is a three and half year project to begin in 2025, if approved.



## Recruitment:

WCI is currently seeking two full-time Research Associates to join our team! We have openings for a permanent [Research Associate within our Plant Pathology team](#), as well as a [1-year Term Contract position with our Barley Breeding program](#), focusing on the digitization of crop phenotyping. For more details and to apply, please see the linked job postings.

We encourage you to share these opportunities with your networks!

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