

SAGIT column for the Stock Journal

Move to boost plant breeding ranks

An investment of more than \$150,000 over the next four years is planned by the SA Grain Industry Trust in a move to supplement Australia's rapidly-thinning plant breeding ranks.

The money will be used to train a cereal plant breeder by providing scholarships for an Honours and a PhD research program – the project being an initiative of the Molecular Plant Breeding CRC, through the University of Adelaide.

MPBCRC chief executive officer, Dr Bryan Whan, said it was clear from recent surveys and grain industry experience, that there would be a significant shortage of trained plant breeders in the near future.

“Australian plant breeding organisations have had difficulty in attracting qualified plant breeders to vacant positions,” he said.

“This shortage of current and future plant breeders is a major issue that needs to be confronted by the grains industry otherwise future crop improvement will suffer. The reluctance of students to undertake plant breeding is largely due to incorrect perceptions about the importance of plant breeding and agriculture in general, and also a lack of awareness of what plant breeding is all about.”

Dr Whan said a significant proportion of the advances in plant breeding in the near future would arise through the development and implementation of molecular aspects of breeding, such as the use of molecular markers and genetic engineering.

One way to ensure this technology was used effectively in future plant breeding programs was to provide training that involved molecular as well as the traditional aspects of the science.

“A carefully selected student will be offered the choice of three or four project areas that will aim to improve our understanding of the genetic control of important traits,” Dr Whan said.

“The student will also be expected to develop molecular tools and implementation methodologies to assist in improving the rate of genetic gain for these traits.

“The SA Grain Industry Trust Plant Breeding Scholarship will be offered so that studies and work can start in 2004/05.”

ENDS: bwok