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## **SAGIT BACKS STEM RUST FIGHT**

**By Geoff Thomas, SAGIT Project Manager**

SAGIT has joined the fight against stem rust in wheat by funding a major project on Yorke Peninsula and Eyre Peninsula.

Stem rust has the potential decimate yields in some varieties. The yields of Yitpi, which is susceptible, can be reduced by 50%, whereas a more resistant variety such as Frame might only lose 10%. Overall losses in South Australia alone could be valued at \$152m. The situation is potentially worse in Victoria where Yitpi is the major variety.

Many farmers had selected varieties resistant to stripe rust, only to find them susceptible to stem rust. Availability of varieties resistant to both diseases is limited by PBR conditions, and that they are not in the APW or Hard classifications.

Some stripe rust was detected on EP last year and with the green bridge over summer, a high level of inoculum has built up to threaten the crop this winter.

The research, to be led by Bill Long of Ag Consulting Co, will track the development of the disease and include a comprehensive mix of fungicides in fertilizers at seeding, as well as fungicide spray rates and timing during the season. In this way, the treatments will be matched to the season and disease. It may be that the seasonal conditions are such that the disease does not develop, but that is a risk SAGIT is not prepared to take.

The results of the research will be relayed to farmers across the State via a large communication program using field days and all forms of media. This will be prompt and accurate so that farmers, who are monitoring their own crops, can make decisions based on the best information in terms of potential yield loss and control strategy.

The program compliments work being funded by GRDC in the higher rainfall areas, which through experts Nick Poole from NZ and Hugh Wallwork from SARDI, is being brought to the new work on EP and YP.

Obviously, even though much of the current emphasis is on stem rust, it will be important that farmers also closely monitor crops for other diseases such as stripe rust, which still pose a real threat.

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