CHICKPEAS HARD TO RESIST

An all WA research alliance could drive growers back to the $800 per tonne kabuli chickpea market through the release of new ascochyta blight resistant kabuli varieties.

After an exhaustive international resistance breeding effort, evaluation and selection program, WA’s Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA) is now intensively testing 28 superior lines to identify the best for quick commercial release.

“Our Australia could sustain a $160 million kabuli chickpea industry if it overcame the ascochyta blight hurdle that emerged in 1996, slashing the area sown to the crop,” CLIMA Director, Kadambot Siddique explained.

The CLIMA project, begun in 1998 with support from the Grains Research and Development Corporation, now has 2000 progressive WA grain growers funding the final testing of superior ascochyta resistant, high yielding and high quality kabuli chickpea. The best varieties shape as excellent prospects for commercialisation through the Council of Grain Grower Organisations (COGGO).

COGGO administers a voluntary farm gate levy on behalf of its 2000 WA grower members to help finance research which its board believes will profit local industry.

“Financially, kabuli chickpea is the highest returning pulse crop in Australia and the large seeded, ascochyta resistant varieties emerging from this CLIMA project are displaying good adaptation to local conditions and eastern Australia,” said Bindi Bindi grower and COGGO Chairman, Bruce Piper.

“That could help extend this variety to more areas, enabling more growers to qualify for high value markets they otherwise may not have.”

New kabuli varieties could be grown on 200,000 hectares nationally to capture royalties for WA shareholders, via COGGO, and for CLIMA’s research program.

The project screened more than 1500 kabuli chickpea breeding lines in Izmir, Turkey from the Syrian International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas and the Turkish Agean Agricultural Research Institute between 1998 and 2000.
Professor Siddique selected 335 lines with good ascochyta resistance and suitable agronomic qualities for importation to Australia where adaptation and disease nursery testing narrowed the field to 28 elite lines, which are now undergoing Australia-wide yield testing to identify the best commercialisation options.

An innovative fast-tracking approach, with simultaneous winter multiplication at the Department of Agriculture’s irrigated Carnarvon research station and national yield testing, will shorten the time to commercialisation.

“Seeds are multiplying by 20–40 times at Carnarvon, or up to eight times faster than in southern Australia. With this approach and COGGO support, we hope to release the project’s first variety by the 2004 growing season,” Professor Siddique said.

ENDS

Authorised by CLIMA and issued on its behalf by
Brendon Cant & Associates PR, Tel 08 9385 7779

MEDIA CONTACT: Professor Kadambot Siddique, Tel 08 9380 7012

kabuli/clima.doc