

US, Canada, Australia Wheat Groups Vow Support For Biotechnology

By Bill Tomson Of DOW JONES NEWSWIRES

WASHINGTON (Dow Jones)--Turning back on years of fear that consumers would reject genetically modified wheat, farm groups in the U.S., Canada and Australia announced their support Thursday of commercializing seeds engineered to improve the crop.

"Basic agronomic improvements to wheat like strengthening disease and insect resistance, enhancing wheat's use of soil nutrients and water, increasing its tolerance to weather extremes like drought and frost, are all possible with biotechnology," according to a joint statement by the groups.

The National Association of Wheat Growers, the U.S. Wheat Associates and North American Millers' Association are the U.S. based groups. The Canadian groups are the Grain Growers of Canada, the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association and the Alberta Winter Wheat Producers Commission. The Australian groups are the Grains Council of Australia, the Grain Growers Association and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of Western Australia Inc.

The groups pledged to work "toward the goal of synchronized commercialization of biotech traits in our wheat crops."

Companies and the U.S. government have genetically modified wheat seeds, but none have ever been commercialized. Spokespersons for the U.S. Wheat Associates and National Association of Wheat Growers agreed that it will likely be years before genetically modified wheat will be commercialized in the U.S.

But most seeds for other crops like corn and soybeans are genetically modified in the U.S., and that has made them more profitable to farmers than wheat, the groups said.

"If wheat continues on a non-biotech course, then farmers will continue to devote a greater share of their acreage to biotech crops, where profitability is relatively greater, resulting in lower world wheat production than would otherwise be the case," the groups said in their joint statement.

-By Bill Tomson, Dow Jones Newswires; 202-646-0088; bill.tomson@dowjones.com

Click here to go to Dow Jones NewsPlus, a web front page of today's most important business and market news, analysis and commentary:

<http://www.djnewsplus.com/access/al?rnd=lqurHzy54Ksoo8yrPNKWxA%3D%3D>. You can use this link on the day this article is published and the following day.

May 14, 2009 13:24 ET (17:24 GMT)