



## **International Wheat Genome Sequencing Consortium**

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### **Wheat Consortium Off to a Great Start.**

Washington—The first meeting of the International Wheat Genome Sequencing Consortium (WGSC) took place last week in Bozeman, Montana. Rudi Appels, Australian co-chair of the WGSC, said that the meeting was an excellent opportunity for the wheat community to take ownership of the consortium. He noted as well that it was particularly exciting to have representation from the National Association of Wheat Growers.

Dale Schuler, first vice-president of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), stated that NAWG is fully supportive of mapping the wheat genome and believes it is critical technology in support of breeding, developing new uses, improving yields and quality, competing with other crops, and ensuring a viable U.S. wheat industry.

“Wheat has been under-researched significantly when compared to crops like corn, soybeans, and cotton. The effect of this can be seen in the advances made in yield, quality, agronomic and end-use characteristics that have not yet been realized by wheat,” Schuler said.

Bikram Gill, the U.S. co-chair for WGSC, said that the meeting was a significant landmark event in delineating the roadmap for wheat genome physical mapping and sequencing. “We had excellent participation from international scientists who expressed great enthusiasm for the project,” said Gill from Kansas State University.

“The meeting was the occasion of very fruitful discussions on the strategies to follow for reaching the short and mid term goals of the consortium,” stated Catherine Feuillet, the European co-chair for the WGSC. “The meeting confirmed the commitment that we have in Europe to the WGSC and provided exciting insights into ongoing research in Europe.”

Some think it is a daunting prospect to sequence the wheat genome because it is so large. The exciting progress reported at the meeting by Drs. Dolezal and Feuillet has made the members of the consortium much more confident that it can be done.

“The description of progress in Europe in building and exploiting chromosome specific libraries raised our confidence levels tremendously,” said Forrest Chumley, a member of the WGSC Coordinating Committee. He noted that this progress would ensure that we have more effective international cooperation and coordination and would allow the early efforts to be focused on the chromosome regions that will produce the most useful results.

Efforts of the WGSC will focus initially on sequencing a region of wheat that is especially rich in agronomically important traits, including genes for fusarium head blight, glume blotch and rust resistances. Additional physical maps to the 3B map are also in focus.

The international WGSC is a collaboration of scientists, industry, and governmental entities dedicated to expediting the development of a physical map anchored to the genetic map and sequencing of the wheat genome for global benefits. Membership in the WSGC is open to any individual or organization that supports the organization’s goals and objectives.

Wheat is the staple food for 40% of the world’s population, providing 20% of the calories and 55% of the carbohydrates consumed. The sequence of the wheat genome will result ultimately in healthier and more nutritious food that could lead to vast improvements in human and animal health.

According to Kellye Eversole, the group’s executive director, there were over 50 scientists representing 8 countries at the first meeting. “Over the next few months, we will continue to build support for and participation in the WGSC,” she said.

Organizational materials, membership forms, and other information about the consortium are available on the International WGSC website at [www.wheatgenome.org](http://www.wheatgenome.org).

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