Peas and lentils will be the big crops here this decade

“Farmers want to seed anything but wheat!”

By Caroline Downs

Peas and lentils are gaining acres in northwestern and north-central North Dakota, while durum is losing ground.

That was part of the message Kent McKay, the North Dakota State University extension agronomist, shared with nearly 120 farmers from the area, including Kenmare, Tolley, Donnybrook and Bowbells. The group met in Kenmare for a “Back to Basics” crop production session organized by Mike Rose, Ward County Extension Agent.

McKay, who works at the North Central Research Extension Center in Minot, collected and analyzed production data since 1993 to prepare for his session “A Decade of Changes in North Dakota Agriculture.”

McKay’s information addressed trends in production seen between 1993 and 2003. “We’re going to forget about 2004,” he told the audience. “We only had three good days to plant after May 10th.”

Statewide, barley acres decreased from 3.7 million to 1.9 million during the decade, while hard red winter wheat declined from 3.3 million to 2.6 million acres. Durum remained steady at 1.5 million acres. “Farmers tell me they want to seed anything but wheat,” McKay said.

Meanwhile, flax, canola, lentils and peas increased dramatically across the state. Soybean acres jumped from 859,000 acres in 1993 to 2,516,000 acres in 2003.

McKay also discussed the importance of production in the northwest and north-central regions of North Dakota relative to the state and the nation.

Yield and weather

During Rose’s session on “Yield and Weather Components,” he told the group he decided to meet with farmers because of the unusual weather in the region experienced in 2004 and the effects of those conditions on the upcoming growing season.

Rose emphasized the importance of long and short-season crops to producers in this region. He also described the impacts of frost and low temperature on the crops grown here, especially given the frost occurring last June and August. “If you suspect frost damage to that seed you’re going to put into the ground, check the germination,” he said. “It’s not too late.”

He advised farmers to consider the risks and benefits of long and short-season crops, providing examples of the roles both have in regulating soil moisture, controlling weeds, dealing with insect and disease problems, managing the harvest, and providing profitable returns.

Growing Degree Days

Two sessions during the morning addressed specific issues.

Lois Voigt, Renville County Extension Agent, talked about growing degree days (GDD) and their use as a tool for growing.

Voigt defined GDD as a measure of warmth occurring over time, which impacts growth and production. She said knowledge of GDD can be applied to decisions about pesticide applications, plant disease, crop-sowing, harvesting time and schedules at harvest, and even vacation planning during the growing season.

whelming the audience to the North Dakota Agricultural Weather Network (NDAWN) website at formation posted on the website is generally 24 hours old. Producers can call to receive the conditions within a given hour. “A lot of people really like it during the spraying season,” she said.

Farmers close to Mohall should call 701-774-1972 for the recording, while those near Minot would call 701-880-2780. Farmers in the Berthold area should call 701-453-3830.

Wheat Streak Mosaic virus

A second technical session was led by Tim Semler, Bottineau County Extension Agent, about the potential threat of the wheat streak mosaic virus (WSMV) in 2005.

Seminor said some fields near Mohall and Bottineau had been affected last fall.

The virus is spread by the wheat curl mite, a microscopic insect dependent on wind for any movement. Generally, the mites are carried by beeze from the southern winter wheat producing states.

The mites can cause a green plant tissue of wheat or other grasses to survive. They thrive in warm, dry conditions and die at temperatures of 32 degrees Fahrenheit or less. Because of this area’s spring wheat matures by August, the threat of WSMV is usually low.

Last year, however, the unique cool late summer conditions that delayed the maturity and harvest of spring wheat made these fields susceptible to WSMV if they were near emerging winter wheat fields that became infected.

Seminor showed several photos of WSMV symptoms in a field and discussed options for management. He reminded the audience that all winter wheat that made its growth stages after June 1 GHz is susceptible to WSMV. Planting winter wheat

An assortment of pea and lentil varieties.