David Baltensperger (left), a crop breeding specialist with the University of Nebraska, and Brad Hansen, a grower, compare varieties during a Pulse Crops Field Day last summer.

Peas gain popularity

Field peas are proving their worth in rotation with wheat

By Raylene Nickel

When it comes to crop rotation alternatives, the more choices the better. Growers, particularly in the Northern Plains, are finding field peas to be a good new addition to their crop rotation plans.

North Dakota, in fact, has replaced the Pacific Northwest as the heart of the nation’s pea-growing region.

Byron Lannoye, who farms 3,500 acres near Church’s Ferry, North Dakota, added peas to his rotation 10 years ago. “I found that field peas typically yield 4 bushels more than wheat on my farm,” he says. “In addition, they provide a nitrogen credit to the soil for the next year’s crop. The credit ranges from 1 to 1 1/2 pounds of nitrogen per bushel of peas.” Lannoye’s field peas typically yield 40 bushels per acre.

Peas are widely adapted

His customer list for seed sales suggests that the acceptable growing range for field peas is expanding. He has sold seed to customers from South Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, Missouri, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, and even Texas.

“Field peas can be grown over a fairly wide region of the United States,” says David Baltensperger, a crop breeding specialist with the University of Nebraska. “Newer varieties are much more tolerant of heat.”

Baltensperger worked with University of Wyoming breeding specialist Jim Kral to help develop and release a forage field pea called Forager.

In developing the variety, they worked with farmers in eastern Colorado, eastern Wyoming, western South Dakota, western North Dakota, and western Nebraska.

“The feedlot industry’s need for protein is driving demand for field peas in Nebraska,” he says. “We also have a lot of cow-calf producers growing peas.”