



Thursday, 8 September, 2016

Pulses gain 'faba' with researchers and growers

With the Hart Field Day set to kick off next week, and with pulse production in Australia and Canada continuing to grow, there is plenty to collaborate on in terms of research.

That is the word from Clare-based South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) research scientist Larn McMurray and his PhD mentor, Professor Bert Vandenberg from Canada's University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon.

The pair have collaborated for 20 years in pulse research, most recently with Mr McMurray undertaking part of his Grains Research and Development Cooperation-funded PhD on 'improving weed control in lentil production' under Prof Vandenberg's guidance in Canada.

Together, Mr McMurray, from SARDI – a division of Primary Industries and Regions SA – and Prof Vandenberg will share some of their research at the Hart Field Day on Tuesday, 20 September, in what is incidentally the International Year of Pulses.

"We both work on pulse breeding and agronomic research and have shared ideas and methodologies over the years with the joint aim of improving world pulse, and in particular lentil, production," Mr McMurray said.

"Even though Canada is now growing around 2 million hectares of lentils compared with about 250,000ha in Australia, world lentil demand is currently outpacing world supply, leading to good prices and large interest in the crop globally.

"This interest is continuing to drive the need for improved lentil varieties and agronomic systems and management to optimise production and performance."

While many of the research ideas between the two countries are similar, particularly in areas such as weed control, disease resistance and adaption to modern mechanised stubble retained farming systems, there are some major differences in the breeding programs.

This is partly due to Canada's production occurring in high latitude areas on stored soil moisture and snow melt, supplemented by summer rainfall events under warm temperatures and extremely long day lengths.

Professor Vandenberg says the future of both the Australian and Canadian pulse industry will require ongoing investment.

"Agronomy is always adapting to the changing biological landscape and ecosystems as genetic technology changes along with the evolving ecology of weeds, insects and plant pathogens," he said.

"This means that the future is going to require research investment in tools and technologies to maintain adequate returns on pulse crop production so that they will remain part of the agricultural economic ecosystems.

"All things considered, both Australia and Canada are late-comers to the benefits that pulses can provide in cropping systems. But better late than never."

Hart Field Day on Tuesday, 20 September, features a rolling program of 22 sessions, featuring 39 specialist speakers. For more information or to purchase a ticket go to www.hartfieldsite.org.au