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The International Wheat Yield Partnership Appoints Program Director

The new International Wheat Yield Partnership (IWYP) has appointed Dr Jeff Gwyn as Program Director to lead the program towards its vision of increasing wheat yields by 50% by 2034.

IWYP is a novel funding and coordination partnership for stimulating wheat research and development and the translation of scientific discoveries into elite wheat varieties ready for marketing to both non-industrialised and industrialised countries. It brings together research funders, international aid agencies, foundations, companies and major wheat research organisations to help raise the genetic yield potential of wheat by up to 50% over the coming 20 years. It was formally launched in Mexico at CIMMYT in April 2014 and began its operations in November 2014.



Globally, wheat is the most important staple crop, providing 20% of daily calories and protein. Due to population growth and changing diets, wheat demand is expected to increase by 60% by 2050. To meet this demand, annual wheat yield increases must grow from the current level of below 1% to at least 1.7%. These urgent global needs have provided the motivation for the formation of IWYP by major agricultural research funding organisations in many countries.

Dr Jeff Gwyn has now been appointed Director and will lead all aspects of IWYP's program. Dr Gwyn has had a career as a plant breeder and research manager for leading commercial crops in large and small companies, including the development and commercialisation of beneficial traits through both conventional and new breeding technologies. He will create, coordinate and guide the multinational research program, developed from competitive bids and other programs with similar objectives, towards commercially relevant breakthroughs that result in current maximum yields being exceeded. Wherever these breakthroughs are found, they will be built into elite commercially relevant germplasm in liaison with CIMMYT or other public and private sector breeding programs as rapidly as possible.

IWYP will launch its first competitive call for research proposals in early 2015. The call will invite applications that seek to address how wheat yield potential can be enhanced by: increasing carbon capture before flowering; optimising plant architecture; modifying flowering time; increasing biomass; optimizing harvest index. Further details will be posted at <http://iwyp.org/> later this month.

Dr Gwyn and his operations will be hosted by AgriLife at Texas A&M University, USA. AgriLife is a long-established and renowned centre for agricultural research, including crop breeding.

Dr Richard Flavell FRS, who chairs the Science Impact and Executive Board of IWYP, says: "Dr Gwyn's appointment will give great impetus to IWYP's ambitious programme. His deep knowledge of crop biology, breeding and product development will ensure that research discoveries will be led forward towards elite products".

Mr Stephen Visscher, CBE, Deputy Chief Executive of the BBSRC, a major funder of IWYP and plant and agricultural research in the UK, says: “Dr Gwyn brings excellent programme management experience of complex and multinational breeding programmes. His appointment enables the vision of the funding organisations behind IWYP to be moved forward at a fast pace, using his extensive experience in agricultural research and commercial plant breeding”.

Dr. Rob Bertram, Chief Scientist in the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Food Security, which supports IWYP as part of its agricultural research through Feed the Future, the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative, said, “We are excited about the appointment of Dr. Gwyn. Jeff's rich experience in plant breeding with the private sector will ensure that research funded through IWYP will lead to products that benefit smallholder farmers in the developing world.”

Ends

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About IWYP

The Partnership was instigated by the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Mexico's Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in 2012. IWYP represents a long-term, global endeavour that utilizes a collaborative approach to bring together funding from public and private research organisations from a large number of countries.

The Partnership will support both core infrastructure and facilitate transnational open calls for research, all targeted at raising the yield potential of wheat.

Over the first five years, the growing list of partners aims to invest up to US\$100 million.

All partners are committed to transparency, collaboration, open communication of results, data sharing as well as improved coordination to maximize global impact and eliminate duplication of effort.

IWYP is an independent research activity but will help the Wheat Initiative to fulfil its mission to “co-ordinate wheat research and contribute to global food security”.

References

<http://ccafs.cgiar.org/bigfacts/#theme=food-security>

<http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/publications/topic/future-bread.aspx>