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Wheat rust information resources: Integrated tools and data for improved decision making

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Wheat rusts present an ever-changing global threat to the world wheat crop. Emergence of virulent new races in one region has implications for other regions, due to wind-borne or human-borne movements. Therefore informed decision making regarding control and mitigation of wheat rusts requires an integrated set of datasets on both pathogen and host at the global level. The Global Cereal Rust Monitoring System (GCRMS), created under the Durable Rust Resistance in Wheat (DRRW) project, represents a unique and increasingly comprehensive resource of rust information. A suite of tools is now available, giving access to an unprecedented set of data for rust surveys, alternate hosts (barberry), pathotypes, trap nurseries and resistant cultivars. Standardized protocols for data collection have permitted the development of a comprehensive data management system, named the Wheat Rust Toolbox. Integration of the CIMMYT Wheat Atlas and the Genetic Resources Information System (GRIS) databases provides a rich resource on wheat cultivars and their resistances to important rust pathogen races. Data access is facilitated via dedicated web portals such as Rust Tracker (www.rusttracker.org) and the Global Rust Reference Center (www.wheatrust.org). Current status and new developments relating to the Global Cereal Rust Monitoring System and related information resources will be described.

FAO Global Wheat Rusts Program strengthens national capacities to manage wheat rusts

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Productivity of wheat is critical for global food security, especially for livelihoods of small farmholders in developing countries. The rusts are among the major biological constraints to wheat production causing significant yield and quality losses in many countries. Strengthened national capacities are essential to facilitate development and implementation of effective policies for integrated rust management. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has been implementing a global program for management of wheat rusts as a member of BGRI. The program is run in context of the Emergency Prevention System (EMPRES) and aims to contribute to strengthening of national capacities for development and implementation of more effective policies to ensure better preparedness, prevention and integrated management of these diseases. Numerous projects were implemented between 2008 and 2013 in collaboration with international organizations and national institutions of participating countries in Eastern and Northern Africa, the Near East and Central, West and South Asia. Activities include provision of technical assistance and capacity development support as well as promotion of regional and international collaboration. These efforts facilitate delivery of support towards contingency planning, surveillance, early warning, race analysis, seed production, development and use of resistant cultivars, technology transfer, and training of technical officers and farmers. Efforts have been made for use of innovative tools and approaches as well as utilization of proven technologies. Experiences indicate that such efforts must be intensified and up-scaled for field level interventions through strengthened research – extension linkages.

An SMS network tool for rapid surveillance of wheat rusts through extension offices: A pilot initiative in Turkey

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The rusts are among the major disease constraints causing significant losses to wheat crops in many wheat-producing countries. Their management requires effective and integrated coordination including timely monitoring and responses to epidemics. The effectiveness of survey activities depends on the level of coordination among institutions, coverage, timely surveillance, and rapid communication and information sharing. In order to facilitate speeding up of surveillance processes at the field level, a pilot SMS system was developed and established in the Central Anatolia region of Turkey with the support of Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock of Turkey, IFAD and the Italian Development Cooperation. The system is composed of an SMS gateway tool, an operation unit and a network of extension offices in provinces and districts, as well as Research Institutes. The system facilitates daily monitoring of the rusts status in the districts involved and real time exchange of the observations among the institutions as well as warning authorities about rust occurrence in target provinces and districts. Initial assessments indicate that the system facilitates rapid exchange of information among extension offices in the districts, central operation unit, and relevant authorities at various levels. The system can serve as an efficient communication and decision-making tool to facilitate timely interventions in case of sudden epidemics. Additionally, it can assist research communities to design detailed surveys in the most appropriate locations, and also serves as a support tool for the global rust monitoring efforts.

A new early-warning system for stripe rust affecting wheat and triticale: Host-pathogen interactions under different environmental conditions

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Stripe (yellow) rust has been the most damaging disease in Danish organic wheat and triticale production since 2009. There were estimated losses of approximately 50 million DKK (9 million USD) in 2009. Until that time, triticale was considered the most robust cereal crop for organic farming. The sudden change was explained by the appearance of an exotic and aggressive *Pst* race that attacked most of the triticale varieties grown at that time, resulting in yield losses of 50-100% for organic farmers. At present, Tulus is the most widely grown triticale variety in Denmark. Although originally resistant it was susceptible under field conditions in March 2012. All *Pst* isolates from Tulus, obtained from multiple locations, were identified as the ‘Kranich’-race, and were avirulent on Tulus under experimental conditions. In May and June 2012 Tulus recovered on a country-wide scale and was resistant. In order to investigate this sudden ‘susceptibility’ of wheat/triticale two main tasks will be carried out to: 1) study the influence of environmental factors on changes in response of wheat and triticale varieties, and 2) investigate the influence of pathogen genetic background on changes in virulence to wheat and triticale varieties.

Inferring the origin and trajectories of recent invasions of wheat yellow rust strains from worldwide population structure

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Several important cases of recent invasions have been reported at continental scales for *Puccinia striiformis* f.sp. *tritici* (PST), in line with its long distance migration capacity. These include the incursion of the disease into North America, South America, Australia, South Africa as well as the most recent worldwide invasion of two aggressive strains adapted to high temperature. Despite the economic importance of these invasions, little is known about their origin and invasion trajectories, crucial in anticipation of future invasions. Inference on their origin and trajectories could be made through genetic analyses of worldwide pathogen populations. We analyzed the multilocus microsatellite data and the pathotypes of a set of 409 isolates representative of the distribution of the fungus on six continents, including the recently invaded strains to infer on the worldwide PST population structure and the origin of recent invasions. The Bayesian and multivariate analyses of worldwide representative isolates, excluding these invaded strains and pathotypes, partitioned them into six distinct genetic groups associated with their likely geographical origin. The inclusion of the representative isolates of recent invasions into the analyses confirmed the origin of these invasions. Our results indicated Middle East-Red Sea Area as the most likely source of newly spreading, high-temperature-adapted strains; Europe as the source of South American, North American and Australian populations; and Mediterranean-Central Asian populations as the origin of South African populations. The worldwide population subdivision and the origin and trajectories of these invasions emphasize the importance of human activities on recent long-distance spread of the disease.

Screening for stem rust resistance in East Africa: A global effort to mitigate the threat of Ug99

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International stem rust screening nurseries coordinated by CIMMYT, KARI and EIAR have made significant progress and impact on the global wheat community in addressing the threat of Ug99. These institutions play key roles in the DRRW project for identifying new sources of resistance, pre-breeding, CIMMYT-Kenya shuttle breeding, pathogen survey and surveillance, varietal release, mapping APR and major genes, and genomic selection. About 250,000 lines have been screened against *Pgt* race Ug99 and derivatives since 2005, and the screening capacity at KARI has increased from 20,000 to 50,000 lines each year. Similarly, close to 60,000 lines have been screened at EIAR, Debre-Zeit. Significant investments in infrastructure and facilities have ensured reliable phenotypic data over years. The results from international nurseries show a shift to higher frequencies of lines with resistance to race Ug99. The KARI-CIMMYT screening nursery has produced global benefits resulting in the release of forty varieties. The training course at KARI each year supported by the DRRW project is designed to train wheat breeders from the public and private sectors in Africa, the Middle East and Central and South Asia, who wish to learn about stem rust, evaluation of germplasm, and standardization of note taking, and to update themselves with global knowledge and innovative techniques that can enhance progress and efficiency in their breeding activities. The long-term partnership between CIMMYT, KARI and EIAR is making huge strides in the fight against the Ug99 race group and is producing outcomes that benefit the entire global wheat community.