



MEDIA RELEASE

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PROPER ASSESSMENT IS KEY TO DETERMINING WINTER WHEAT STAND ESTABLISHMENT THIS SPRING

Oak Hammock Marsh, Man., May 13, 2011 – Spring is finally here on the Prairies and growers are hopefully able to start seeding. Decisions made over the next few weeks will not only impact this fall's harvest, but also this fall's seeding season.

Despite inclement weather during last fall's seeding season, approximately 695,000 acres of winter wheat were seeded last year. Most winter wheat fields are recovering nicely and will produce profitable crops for producers. However, since winter wheat is the only annual crop producers have that is growing right now, it is the only crop they can worry about. Most concerns this year surround the question: "How will my winter wheat crop handle spring flooding?"

"Depending on the spring weather conditions, a stand which has survived the winter may require time to recover and resume growth after dormancy," says Paul Thoroughgood, regional agrologist for Ducks Unlimited Canada. "As a general rule of thumb, delay spring assessment until most other spring seeding is complete. This means assessing the winter wheat crop between May 15 and May 25, which gives enough time to reseed if necessary. This will give the crop a chance to recover especially in areas that were flooded early and may have taken longer to resume growth."

Assessing the crop condition early is difficult as brown leaf material in early spring may not be a sign of winterkill and green leaves may not mean the crop has survived. The best way to properly assess individual plants is to examine their crown area for growth development.

To determine crown health, dig up several plants at various locations across the field. The crowns should then be placed on a moist paper towel in a warm room that will be exposed to light for about two hours. A damaged crown will turn brown, while a healthy crown system will be white in colour.

To get an idea of the worst case scenario, take small plants from areas with poor snow cover, says Thoroughgood. If these plants survive, the rest should be fine.

The optimum winter wheat plant stand is 20 to 30 plants per square foot. Winter wheat has the ability to tiller relatively aggressively, therefore stands between eight to 10 plants per square foot can still produce an adequate crop.

The challenge when assessing stand establishment is often the variability in the plant stand across the whole field. In situations where the stand is thin or weak, a more intense management strategy is required.

"Application of nitrogen early in the spring will encourage the remaining plants to tiller," says Thoroughgood. "A thin plant stand is typically less competitive against weeds and growers may find it beneficial to pay more attention to broadleaf and grassy-weed control."

Only when the stand has been properly assessed and deemed unacceptable should a producer terminate the winter wheat crop and reseed. If this occurs, consider the following management practices:

- Spray out the winter wheat as the crop will draw on moisture and nutrient reserves.

- Avoid replanting to cereals, especially wheat. The wheat streak mosaic may carryover from infected winter wheat into spring-seeded cereals. If replanting wheat, a 10- to 14-day window should be left before reseeding to avoid problems.
- Remember to credit any spring applied nitrogen to the following crop.

As it stands now, most western Canadian winter wheat crops look great and are the only ones taking advantage of the early spring moisture – setting them up to produce profitable results for their growers.

For more information on winter wheat spring assessment, contact your local Ducks Unlimited Canada agrologist or visit wintercereals.ca.

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*The shared vision of Ducks Unlimited Canada and Bayer CropScience for the future of agriculture includes a stewardship model that recognizes the agricultural productivity of farmland while retaining and improving the habitat available to North America's waterfowl and other wildlife. As a result, Bayer and DUC have joined together to identify, research and promote cropping system changes that benefit the conservation of our natural resources in an economically viable way. The first step in this relationship is the **Winter Cereals: Sustainability in Action** project.*

For further information, please contact:

Karli Reimer, k_reimer@ducks.ca
 National Communications – Conservation
 Ducks Unlimited Canada
 Phone: (204) 467-3279
 Cell: (204) 801-1211



Ducks Unlimited Canada
 Conserving Canada's Wetlands

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Additional information about Ducks Unlimited Canada is available at: www.ducks.ca



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