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Record Attendance for Kansas Wheat Tour, May 1-3

The wheat industry will get its first look at the Hard Red Winter wheat crop during next week's Hard Wheat Quality Tour, sponsored by the Wheat Quality Council.

The group will depart Manhattan May 1, travel 4,000 miles in four different pre-determined routes throughout Kansas, and conclude the tour May 3 at the Kansas City Board of Trade, where the participants' will reveal an average production estimate for the 2012 Kansas wheat crop.

The annual Wheat Quality Tour is an educational and networking opportunity for those involved, says Justin Gilpin, chief executive officer of the Kansas Wheat Commission and Kansas Association of Wheat Growers. "The tour is widely known for bringing together all segments of the wheat industry, where it all begins: in the field, with farmers."

At more than 100 participants, this year's tour is one of the largest in recent memory, featuring representatives from government agencies and the milling and baking industries, plus farmers, journalists, retail organizations, state wheat association staff members, plus specialists from K-State Research and Extension. At the conclusion of each day, the participants evaluate what they've seen in the state's wheat fields; a wrap-up session at the Kansas City Board of Trade will forecast the yield of the 2012 crop.

The 2012 crop is at a pivotal juncture. It is at least two weeks ahead of schedule, and the yield looks promising. However, long-term drought stress is beginning to appear in western Kansas, and much of the crop has been challenged by foliar diseases. Overall, however, the crop is rated mostly good to excellent, based on the April 23 Kansas Crop Statistics Weekly Crop Report.

Ben Handcock, director of the Wheat Quality Council, says the tour gives the entire wheat chain an understanding of the crop.

"We're teaching all these participants what it takes to grow a wheat crop in the United States, from how much money is required to grow a crop, to the risks involved," he explains. "Many of the tour participants deal with wheat or wheat-related issues in their professions, yet they may not have ever seen a field of wheat. This tour provides a great opportunity for them to gain a greater understanding of the industry."

More than 500 stops will be made at locations throughout the state, and yield estimates taken using a formula developed by the National Ag Statistics Service. Participants gain a firsthand understanding of what it takes for farmers to grow, manage, harvest and market the crop. Many foreign buyers of Kansas wheat will participate, giving those folks a chance to see the high quality of the Kansas crop, Handcock says.

The Wheat Quality Council aims to improve the quality of all U.S. wheat varieties and act as an information conduit between wheat breeders and millers and bakers. It sponsors an additional tour of Hard Spring and Durum wheat throughout North Dakota, South Dakota, and Minnesota.

For daily Wheat Tour updates, log onto our blog, www.thewheatbeat.wordpress.com