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Cooperative Research Focus of Barley Conference

The cooperative nature of barley research and improvement efforts was evident at the 36th Barley Improvement Conference at the Hacienda Hotel in San Diego, Calif., on Jan. 10-11.

Nearly 80 barley researchers, scientists, industry officials and outreach personnel from the U.S., Canada, Scotland, Australia and the Czech Republic attended. Researchers from the USDA-CSREES-funded Barley Coordinated Agriculture Project (CAP) also were in attendance and held their annual meeting on Jan. 12 in the same location.

Ten educational sessions, as well as breakout meetings to discuss malting barley research, agricultural policy and quality evaluation issues, were held. The educational sessions included topics on international barley disease control, malting quality standards, biofuel production, barley winter hardiness, the health benefits of food barley, and genomics and technology methods used to enhance barley breeding.

The capstone of the conference was a speech by Richard Groven, Northwood, ND farmer and vice president of the National Barley Growers Association, titled "Barley – the Outlook and the Look-Outs."

Changes in barley production have been rather dramatic in recent years. According to Groven, production; has decreased from 118,800,000 bushels in 2003 to 48,755,000 bushels in 2006. Barley acreage decreased from 1,980,000 acres in 2003 to 995,000 acres in 2006.

However, recent events give cause for increased optimism for barley producers. Prices have increased since July and the feed barley market has revived due in part to the increased need for corn for ethanol production. Dry conditions also have forced increased consumption of carryover stocks. New variety research also looks promising. Groven stated that "sound varieties and improved prices allow for an optimistic outlook for barley in 2007."

The Barley CAP is a cooperative research program that corrals the expertise of more than 10 breeding programs in the U.S. The purpose is to utilize state-of-the-art genetic research tools to identify important genes for barley agronomics, disease resistance and malt and food quality. The CAP portion of the meeting was attended by scientists from the U.S., Canada, Scotland and Australia. Presenters were from CAP research institutions in Minnesota, California, Oregon, and Iowa.

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