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Aims to Improve Prospects for Wheat Sensitive Individuals

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Three Wheat Organizations Collaborating on the Research Project

(Red Lake Falls, MN), April 24, 2018 – The Alberta Wheat Commission (AWC), Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission (Sask Wheat) and Minnesota Wheat Research and Promotional Council (MWRPC) are pleased to announce their collaborative, cross-border funding of a research project aimed at determining whether the process used to produce sourdough bread could lead to a more easily digested food option for individuals who are sensitive to wheat consumption.

Funding for this project includes \$70,000 from AWC, \$57,250 from Sask Wheat and \$20,000 from MWRPC for a total of \$147,250 over a three-year period.

Led by Dr. Michael Gänzle, a food microbiologist at the University of Alberta, the project looks at the sourdough bread fermentation process that breaks down proteins and carbohydrates in wheat flour that are known to cause wheat sensitivity. Gänzle's project aims to better understand whether this fermentation process is sufficient in reducing adverse effects. In-turn, Gänzle will define best practices so the resulting bread can be more easily digested by these individuals.

"Wheat is a nutritious ingredient and a food staple for the vast majority of the consuming public – it's life's simple ingredient," says Terry Young, AWC Director and Research Committee Chair. "But for those who cannot enjoy it because of digestion sensitivity, we saw investment in Dr. Gänzle's project as an opportunity to determine if there is a link to the bread production process."

"When we learned of Dr. Gänzle's research we saw tremendous value in the expected outcomes related to the consumption of wheat-based foods," says Tony Brateng, a Roseau farmer, MWRPC board member and Research Committee Chair. "MWRPC is partnering with the Minnesota-based Agricultural Utilization Research Institute for this effort and is very proud of this first-ever joint research funding with our neighboring farmer-led wheat organizations in Western Canada."

"This is a unique project that has exciting potential for the baking industry," says Sask Wheat Chair Laura Reiter. "We hope the results will lead to products that more people can enjoy while creating new market opportunities for grain farmers."

Gänzle also indicates that the use of sourdough in industrial baking reduces ingredient cost and can improve the quality of bread.

"There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that sourdough bread is tolerated by consumers with non-celiac wheat or gluten intolerance but the science is not available to back up these claims," says Dr. Michael Gänzle. "We aim to determine whether fermentation reduces or eliminates individual wheat components that are known or suspected to cause adverse effects."

While Gänzle's project aims to create a more easily digestible product for gluten sensitive individuals, it is recognized that this research won't create a product that is acceptable for the estimated one per cent of the population who suffer from celiac disease.

The commissions look forward to working with Gänzle to report the results of this project upon completion in 2021.

Source: Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council

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