

stubble removed treatment. However, in irrigated wheat, even though the pathogen is present, *Fusarium* may not cause much disease because of the adequate water and lack of plant water stress. Adequate water may also compensate for root damage caused by these pathogens.

RALSTON PROJECT CONTINUES ON!

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The Integrated Spring Cropping Systems Project, better known as the 'The Ralston Project', began in the fall of 1995. The project, collectively conceived and designed by regional growers and scientists, aimed to reduce the risks associated with no-till, annual, and spring cropping systems in areas of low rainfall. Researchers from ten disciplines annually evaluated each cropping system on: a) weed population dynamics; b) soil fertility and nutrient cycling; c) varietal resistance to insects and disease; d) no-till and reduced tillage operation; e) stubble management for soil moisture and erosion control; f) pest populations and chemical inputs for control, and g) economic profitability and risk. Recently, investigators expanded and modified main plots and satellite studies to comply with the requests of interested growers and scientists. The major objectives however, remain consistent.

Two consecutive years of extreme drought hit several crop rotations in Phase II (2000-2002) hard, affecting their overall performance. Now in Phase III, investigators have split the plots to modify treatments and test new rotations. This allows researchers to test decisions related to crop selection, planting date, herbicide requirements, and marketing *based upon prevailing environmental and biological conditions*. These refined treatments include: reduced-till winter wheat or winter canola – fallow; 2) no-till soft white spring wheat (flex crop) or chemical fallow – facultative spring wheat; 3) no-till hard red spring wheat with normal or reduced herbicide applications; 4) no-till spring oats (for forage or seed) – spring triticale, and 5) no-till hard white spring wheat – one-pass till spring barley or no-till spring barley.

In Phase II, an additional researcher conducted a survey to determine if and how the project's innovative research approach and design impacted visiting growers. The survey revealed that growers overwhelmingly viewed the project as a valuable learning tool to control soil moisture, reduce wind erosion, and manage the risk of converting to and sustaining alternative cropping systems. Growers' input from the survey along with researcher input and regional drought during Phase II contributed significantly to redesigning treatments in Phase III.

The field tour featuring Phase III is scheduled for Tuesday, June 1, 2004.