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KWS develops improved *Cercospora* tolerance for sugarbeets

The global seed specialist KWS received a patent grant for improved *Cercospora* tolerance in sugarbeets. The leaf disease *Cercospora beticola* is one of the world's most harmful fungal diseases for sugarbeets: The fungus can result in yield losses of up to 50 percent¹; there is a moderate to high incidence of infection for around two-thirds of cultivated areas worldwide. Using classic breeding methods, KWS is introducing a trait which ensures a new level of *Cercospora* protection in combination with strong yield performance. The patent is directed to processed sugarbeet seed exhibiting the novel *Cercospora* tolerance trait in the US.

“The new *Cercospora* trait truly represents a milestone for classic sugarbeet breeding,” says Dr. Andreas Loock, Head of International Sugarbeet Breeding at KWS. “This is an important contribution to securing the profitability of sugarbeet cultivation for the future.”

One of the ways that growers manage *Cercospora* leaf spot is using varieties that are tolerant of the effects of the pathogen. The current tolerance source in varieties often has a lower level of performance, particularly if the infection rate during the season is low. The KWS research team has managed to “change the rules” with the development of a new trait that offers a new level of protection against *Cercospora* and yield performance in the presence and absence of the disease.

Farmers also manage the disease by the application of fungicides. However, over the course of time, the *Cercospora* pathogen can develop resistance toward fungicides which reduces their efficacy in the field. Increasing regulations on the use of agricultural pesticides in some markets can be an additional limitation. This presents a major challenge for sugarbeet growers around the world. The new *Cercospora* trait also offers potential savings in terms of the amount of fungicides used, thus representing further proof that breeding makes an important contribution to boosting agricultural sustainability.

“The protection of intellectual property through prevailing protection rights enables innovations like this *Cercospora* tolerance,” says Dr. Peter Hofmann, Member of the Executive Board at KWS responsible for the Sugarbeet Segment. “This does not exclude that access to innovation may be provided to others under fair terms which can include licensing to third parties. In line with this position KWS will ensure that the new *Cercospora* tolerance trait in sugarbeet will be made widely available.” Planting in the United States and certain EU markets will start in spring 2021.

¹ Wolf, P. F. J., Kraft, R., and Verreet, J. A. (1998). Characteristics of damage caused by *Cercospora beticola* (sacc.) in sugar beet as a base of yield loss forecast. *Journal for Plant Diseases and Protection* 105, 462-474.

About KWS*

KWS is one of the world's leading plant breeding companies. In the fiscal year 2018/19, more than 5,500 employees in 70 countries generated net sales of EUR 1.1 billion and earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) of EUR 150 million. A company with a tradition of family ownership, KWS has operated independently for more than 160 years. It focuses on plant breeding and the production and sale of seed for corn, sugarbeet, cereals, rapeseed, sunflowers and vegetables. KWS uses leading-edge plant breeding methods to increase farmers' yields and to improve resistance to diseases, pests and abiotic stress. To that end, the company invested approximately EUR 200 million last fiscal year in research and development.

*All indications excluding the results from the companies accounted for using the equity method AGRELIANT GENETICS LLC, AGRELIANT GENETICS INC. and KENFENG – KWS SEEDS CO., LTD.

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