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KWS presents new prospects for managing Cercospora

“Despite numerous challenges, we are absolutely convinced that the sugarbeet will continue to offer great potential in the future. The beet is a true all-rounder and it was, is and remains an important strategic crop at KWS.” With this clear statement, Dr. Alexander Coenen, Regional Director German-Austria, Business Unit Sugarbeet, welcomed around 100 guests to the traditional KWS symposium in Einbeck.

The list of the sugarbeets’ positive characteristics is virtually endless. It serves as a climate protection activist, oxygen producer, regional sugar supplier, grows on local fields and can also be used as a source of renewable energy, animal feed and human nutrition. Dr. Peter Hofmann, Member of the Executive Board at KWS responsible for the Sugarbeet Segment emphasized that KWS is working on various ways to ensure the future viability of the plant. KWS directly and indirectly invests around €90 million annually in the development of new, high-performance varieties. Moreover, this cultivation progress can be measured and amounts to approximately two percent per year, which is the annual equivalent of up to two additional tons of beets per hectare. “As a seed specialist, we are combating future challenges with our core area of expertise, namely plant breeding. After all, in times of increasing regulations and environmental changes, the right variety is playing an increasingly important role in determining success or failure,” said Hofmann.

Furthermore, the leaf disease referred to as Cercospora was also a prevailing topic throughout the course of the symposium. Prof. Mark Varrelmann, Department Head of Phytopathology at the Institute for Sugar Beet Research (Institut für Zuckerrübenforschung, IfZ) in Göttingen, held a lecture on the significance of this disease and current challenges in connection with identifying countermeasures. He explained that between 60 and 90 percent of Germany’s cultivated areas have been impacted by Cercospora and chemical control with fungicides has become difficult due to the increasing spread of various forms of resistance. Carsten Stibbe and Ernst von Stockhausen from KWS AgroService then presented a prospective new solution for combating Cercospora infections. The sugarbeet breeding experts at KWS have managed, with the help of a new source of resistance, to combine the highest degree of resistance with maximum yield. Furthermore, this creates an opportunity to ensure the sugar yield even when faced with strong plant infections, while limiting the use of fungicidal measures. The first varieties could already be available for planting in 2022. By then the breeding and cultivation consulting teams will have had the opportunity to develop a suitable cultivation management approach for the latest generation of this variety. The new genetics represent an important contribution for ensuring sustainable and competitive sugarbeet cultivation in Germany.

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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