

Climate adaptive, drought resistant GMO wheat is nearing introduction in Brazil. Might Canada be next?

Bioceres, an Argentine biotech company, has released a genetically modified wheat variety that is both drought-tolerant and resistant to glufosinate-ammonium. Known as HB4, it was approved late in 2020 although it still faces a number of significant hurdles, first of which is convincing Brazil, Argentina's largest export market, to accept the innovation.

Also, of course, there's the issue of winning over end-users and consumers.

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In Canada, wheat varieties must be registered with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) before they can be introduced, and end-users of wheat have a voice in deciding whether a variety actually brings merit to the marketplace.

Based on consumer concerns, don't look for a GM-wheat variety from South America to make any inroads in Canada in the near future.

The other consideration is agronomic. Is a variety like Argentine HB4 really needed here? A drought-tolerant spring cultivar might spark interest in parts of Saskatchewan where they get 10 to 15 centimetres (four to six inches) of rain per growing season. But breeding a drought-tolerant, glufosinate-ammonium-resistant winter wheat variety for southern Ontario begs the question of whether it's warranted.

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