

# National cultivar evaluation meeting

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ARC-SMALL GRAIN

**T**HE PAST SEASON WAS probably one of the most difficult wheat seasons experienced by modern-day wheat producers. Looking at **Figure 1** compiled by Willem Kilian from ARC-Small Grain in Bethlehem, it becomes clear why wheat producers in the Eastern Free State achieved such low yields. The rainfall that was supposed to occur in the critical period of wheat's development was so low that it can be excluded – in total only 3 mm.

The Eastern Free State has been regarded as the “bread basket” of South Africa, but very little wheat is produced here today, although there are excellent cultivars to choose from. The Western Cape contributed 42% to the total South African wheat production in 2019, while wheat production in the irrigation areas constitutes the other major portion of 54%. A very small percentage of the total production is contributed by wheat under dry land conditions in the summer rainfall area.

With wheat production in South Africa currently in dire straits, ARC-Small Grain's National Cultivar Evaluation Programme (NCEP) is still one of the most important programmes in the wheat industry. With this programme, where all available commercial wheat cultivars of all the seed companies are evaluated in an objective and scientific way for adaptability, yield and quality, ARC-Small Grain does all the research for producers. The cultivars are planted in the same trial so that



Some of the industry representatives who attended the National Cultivar Evaluation meeting in Bethlehem were:

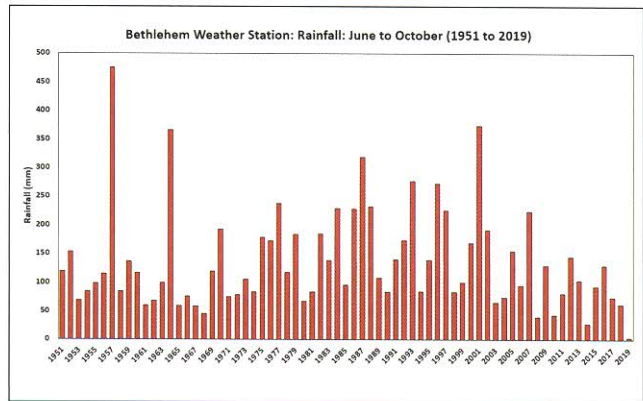
**In front:** Richard Taylor (ARC-Small Grain), Hellen Mopeli (ARC-Small Grain), Dr Nthabiseng Motete (ARC-Central Office), Cornel Bender (University of the Free State) and Dr Maryke Craven (ARC-Small Grain).

**Middle:** Eddie Goldshagg (SANSOR), Yolanda Nortjé (SAGL), Dr Willem Boshoff (University of the Free State), Pieter Craven (Sensako), André du Toit (Pannar) and Dr Toi Tsilo (ARC-Small Grain).

**Back:** Kamohelo Makuoane (ARC-Small Grain), Willem Kilian (ARC-Small Grain), Dr Robbie Lindeque (ARC-Small Grain), Stephan de Groot (Sensako), Dr Tarekegn Terefe (ARC-Small Grain), Kobus van Huyssteen (SANSOR) and Fanie Yssel (K2).



Cultivar evaluation trials in the summer rainfall region in South Africa. Photo: ARC



**Figure 1: Bethlehem rainfall June to October (1951 – 2019).**

producers can compare them very easily. There are three separate evaluation programmes that evaluate specific cultivars in each of South Africa's three production regions.

It is a daunting task for any producer to make a choice among all the cultivars that are recommended in a region if they do not have information on these cultivars. Fortunately, these results are already being released early in the season through various publications in the media so that producers have all the information at their disposal before they have to make a decision.

Wheat is a very versatile crop with a very wide adaptation. It can be equally successfully grown under dry land conditions, as well as under irrigation. In South Africa, wheat is planted from Limpopo in the far north down to the bottom of the country in the Southern and Western Cape. Therefore, the NCEP is executed nationally in all wheat producing regions. Approximately 82 trials were planted at 68 representative sites in the various wheat producing areas during the 2019 season.

At the end of each season, everyone involved in wheat production in South Africa meets to evaluate and discuss the data from the previous season. The committee met again in Bethlehem on February 5, 2020, to update recommendations for the next season. This group consists of industry experts and representatives from all the seed companies, Grain South Africa, the universities of the Free State and Stellenbosch, SANSOR, SABBI, the various departments of agriculture, and other stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting is to ensure that the trials are scientifically conducted and that the data are presented accurately and objectively.

The results of evaluations in South Africa's growing regions and recommendations are published in this and the following issue of *Wheat Focus / Koringfokus*. ♣