Oat production in North America continues with its long-term downward trend in acreage, with only mild gains in yields. Acreage continues to push generally north as more productive crops – particularly corn, soybeans, and canola continue to make faster gains in yield, due considerably to GMO technologies. While there is some renewed interest in small grains, including oats, in areas of sustainable crop rotations and conservation and erosion control, oats continues its image with farmers of being the “the poor man’s crop”, or the “crop of no respect”.

After many years of decline, oats research efforts in the U.S. have seemingly stabilized in terms of funding at land grant universities and with the USDA funded programs. In fact, in the past 2 years we have witnessed breeding positions and efforts reinstated in South Dakota, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and more support in research work by the USDA. Much of this has been promoted by oat industry companies, and includes some work in the organic farming scenarios.

Publicly funded oats research in Canada is primarily focused at two AAFC locations – Brandon, Manitoba, and Ottawa, Ontario, with testing locations managed by these two programs across several provinces. At least 3 private seed company oats programs are active in the country, and are releasing new varieties in both eastern and western Canada. Also of note is a seemingly increased effort by some seed companies in Canada to test multiple lines from several other countries, including the EU, the US, and South America.

Increases in yield, improvements in disease resistance and/or control, and improvements in nutritional traits continue to be of primary interest from the NA oats industry. Breeding strategies are ramping up to incorporate the new technologies and genome mapping capabilities that have been recently advanced through the efforts of Oats Global and its predecessor – CORE.

Notes