

1996 harvest report

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Harvest quality

A late and long drawn out harvest, affected by rain in some parts of the country, has produced a varied quality in the 1996 wheat crop. The protein content of bread wheat is lower than that of last year by a full 0.5% at a mean of 11% versus 11.5%. The average protein content of the whole crop is down by 0.3%, being heavily influenced by the preponderance of biscuit/feed varieties whose protein content is, unsurprisingly, only marginally lower than that of last year.

There is a more varied spread in all proteins than in the 1995 crop. This can be expected to stretch the miller's blending skills and result in a greater use of expensive gluten and/or imported wheats though it must be noted that, apart from certain areas in France, most other parts of Europe have also experienced a harvest of low quality.

Specific weights are lower than last year and moisture content is about 1% higher. There are indications of lower Hagberg levels in the north of the country, although average levels appear a little down on the 1995 crop.

Wheat varieties

Good yields and increased acreage appear to have produced a crop in excess of 15.5 million tonnes; but the continuing downward trend in the very best breadmaking varieties - those in the NABIM Group 1 - can again be observed. Hereward is available in a similar quantity to last year, about 8% of the crop, but Mercia has now dropped to below 2%, and of the others in this group, only Spark is at more than 1%. There seems little prospect that this trend will be reversed in 1997. Spring wheats have not been grown in significant quantity.

Wheats within the NABIM Group 2 classification are less certain to produce flour of breadmaking quality but, where they do, they achieve the premium for bread wheat and can, with careful blending, be used to supplement an otherwise worryingly short supply. Soissons and Rialto have emerged in reasonable quantity (around 4% each), and moderate quantities of Cadenza and Genesis have been grown.

Caxton, a promising breadmaker with Group 1 potential, has been harvested in commercial quantity for the first time and its performance will be monitored with interest.

Riband (20%) is again the main soft wheat and can again be expected to be used for biscuit grists, together with the newcomer Consort (5%). Hunter (9%), another soft wheat, is not of adequate quality for biscuit making. Of the hard, non-breadmaking wheats, the high yielding Brigadier again dominates at 19%, with Hussar (7%) and newcomers Beaufort and Buster available in smaller volume.

Flour performance

Indications are that the baking quality of this year's crop is very similar to that of last year.

Bread has good volume and texture, with a very white crumb colour. This latter feature is good news for those customers who were using bleached flour prior to the banning of benzoyl peroxide, since there should be little difference, if any, this year in bread crumb colour between products made from unbleached flour and those which would have been made from a treated flour.

New crop French wheat is also giving excellent baking performance and manufacturers of baguettes using our quality French flours should be very pleased with the results. Due to the nature of the French harvest, however, it should be noted that somewhat higher than normal water absorptions are being seen this year.

The abundance of soft, non-breadmaking wheats harvested in 1996, which are of satisfactory quality, means that for pizza, cake, biscuit, pastry and wafer manufacturers there should be no obvious problems.

The future

Breadwheat plantings for next season cannot be expected to show any great advance on those of this past season, and it must be hoped that the percentage of the top variety, Hereward, does not decline in favour of the high yielding non-breadmaking types before a worthy successor has established itself.

Top Wheat Producers	
	m tonnes
China	106
EU (15)	93
Former Soviet Union	67
India	64
US	61
Canada	29
Australia	19

Highlights

- Crop over 15.5 million tonnes - 8% increase on last year
- Bread making wheats down from 18% to 11% of total crop
- Protein level of bread making wheats down (0.5%), non-bread making wheats unchanged
- Moisture content 1% higher than last year
- Hagberg FN similar to 1995
- Flour colour good
- Baking performance similar to last year
- Non-bread making flour performance shows no real changes in any respect.