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'Steptoe' Barley to Be Released in 1973

PULLMAN, Wash. ___ --A new high yielding spring-planted feed barley called Steptoe will be released to growers in 1973, agricultural experiment stations in Washington, Idaho and Oregon announced this week.

"Developed by Dr. Robert A. Nilan and Carl Muir, Washington State University plant breeders, Steptoe is a six-row barley which probably will replace two current varieties being grown in the Pacific Northwest, Unitan and Gem," Dr. James Nielson, director of WSU's Agriculture Research Center, said.

Nilan said Steptoe was bred for high yields in both high and low rainfall areas, and will be adapted for growing in eastern Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Wyoming.

"Much higher yielding than Unitan or Gem, Steptoe has good threshability and kernels on the head's six rows are plumper than Unitan's. The variety also is highly resistant to prevalent diseases which affect barley. Steptoe has a medium-length stiff straw, and is more resistant to lodging than Unitan or Gem," he said.

Steptoe has been tested by WSU for four years at Pullman; three years at Pomeroy, Dayton and Walla Walla; and two years at 13 other locations in Washington. It also has been tested for two years at 13 experiment stations in Idaho, Oregon, Montana and Wyoming, Nilan said.

"In tests at the 13 eastern Washington locations, Steptoe's two-year yield average is eight bushels per acre higher than Gem and nine bushels higher than Unitan. In the Farmington area, for example, Steptoe averaged 85 bushels to the acre, while Unitan averaged 65 and Gem 62."

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Nilan said the new variety is a cross between an experimental selection, called Washington 3564, and Unitan. The original cross was made in 1959 at WSU and the selection of Steptoe, which before naming was Selection No. 6428-66, was made in 1966.

Steptoe heads about the same time as Unitan and about five days later than Gem, he said. The new variety's test weight is higher than Gem and about equal to Unitan.

"Steptoe will be increased for seed during 1972 and will be released to growers the next year through the crop improvement associations of the Pacific Northwest states."

Nilan said the new variety was named for Steptoe Butte, in northern Whitman County. As a feed barley, Steptoe will be used for feeding livestock.

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