

New wheat breeding programme cuts a decade off new varieties

NASA experiments to grow wheat in space have inspired Australian scientists to develop a world-first speed-breeding programme that cuts a decade off the time it takes to deliver new varieties.



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New varieties are critical to fighting disease or improving yield, but it can take between 10 and 20 years to breed resistant or productive traits into crops.

But when Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation (QAAFI) senior research fellow, Dr Lee Hickey, saw NASA astronauts using continuous light to trick plants into growing faster in space, he saw a method that could be manipulated to speed up the development of new plant breeds.

“We can go from seed to seed in just six weeks for wheat barley, and it works for a whole bunch of other crops that we grow on a big scale in Australia and other countries around the world, such as chickpea or canola,” he says.

“Our experiments showed that the quality and yield of the plants grown under controlled climate and extended daylight conditions were as good, or sometimes better, than those grown in regular glasshouses.”

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