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Effects of genotype and environment on the  
sprouting propensity and other grain characters of wheat  
(Triticum aestivum L.).

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
LIST OF TABLES	vi
SUMMARY	ix
Chapter one : INTRODUCTION	1
Chapter two : REVIEW OF LITERATURE	
2.1 FACETS OF SPROUTING DAMAGE	4
2.1.1 Dormancy and Germination	4
2.1.2 Hormonal Influences	5
2.1.3 Other Growth Inhibiting Compounds	7
2.1.4 Anoxia	9
2.1.5 Environmental Modification	10
2.1.5a Temperature Effects	10
2.1.5b Environmental Effects During Grain Development	11
2.1.6 Inheritance of Dormancy	12
2.2 MEASUREMENT AND INTERPRETATIONS OF THE GENOTYPE- ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION	14
2.2.1 Analysis of Variance Method	14
2.2.2 Regression on an Independent Variate	15
2.2.3 Regression on Biological Potential	15
2.2.4 Joint Regression Analysis	18
2.2.5 Breeding for Adaptability	18
2.3 ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE PROCEDURE	21
2.3.1 Statistical Model	21
2.3.2 Anova Mechanics	23
2.3.3 Assumptions underlying the Anova	26
Chapter three : MATERIAL AND METHODS	28
3.1 EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN	28
3.2 CULTURAL ASPECTS	29
3.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURES	30
3.4 ASSAY PROCEDURES	30
3.4.1 Germination	31
3.4.2 Alpha-amylase	32
3.4.3 Flavan-3-ol Concentration	33
3.4.4 Pericarp Colour	34
3.4.5 Grain moisture	34
3.5 STATISTICAL METHODS	34
Chapter four : RESULTS	38
4.1 MOISTURE CONTENT	38
4.2 GRAIN DRY-WEIGHT	44
4.3 PIGMENTATION	49
4.4 FLAVAN-3-OL CONCENTRATION	56
4.5 GERMINATION	56

TABLE OF CONTENTS (Cont.)		Page
4.6	EMBRYO MATURITY	67
4.7	EMBRYO "DORMANCY"	74
4.8	BASAL ALPHA-AMYLASE CONCENTRATION	82
4.9	ALPHA-AMYLASE RESPONSE	88
Chapter five : DISCUSSION		95
5.1	GENOTYPE, ENVIRONMENT AND GENOTYPE- ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS	95
5.1.1	Curve Statistics	95
5.1.2	Derived Statistics	96
5.2	COMPARISON OF CURVE TYPES	103
5.3	BIOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS	104
5.3.1	Grain Desiccation and Growth	104
5.3.2	Flavan-3-ol Concentration	105
5.3.3	Polyphenoloxidase, Pigmentation, and Colour	106
5.3.4	Dormancy and the Effects of the Environment	108
5.3.5	Basal Alpha-Amylase, and Alpha-Amylase Response	112
5.4	BREEDING METHODS	114
5.5	EXPERIMENTAL METHODS	115
CONCLUSION		118
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		120
REFERENCES		121
APPENDIX		146

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
4.1 Changes in grain moisture content during grain development showing six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A5.1).	39
4.2 Changes in grain moisture content during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A6.1).	40
4.3 Changes in grain dry weight during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A5.2).	45
4.4 Changes in grain dry weight during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A6.2).	46
4.5 Development of pigmentation during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A5.3).	50
4.6 Development of pigmentation during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendix A6.3).	51
4.7 Changes in flavan-3-ol concentration during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A5.4 and A5.5).	57
4.8 Changes in flavan-3-ol concentration during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.4 and A6.5).	58
4.9 Changes in germination during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A5.6 and A5.7).	62
4.10 Changes in germination during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.6 and A6.7).	63

## LIST OF FIGURES (Cont.)

Figure	Page
4.11 Changes in embryo maturity during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A5.8 and A5.9).	68
4.12 Changes in embryo maturity during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.8 and A6.9).	69
4.13 Changes in embryo "dormancy" during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A.10 and A.11).	76
4.14 Changes in embryo dormancy during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.10 and A6.11).	77
4.15 Changes in basal alpha-amylase activity during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A5.12 and A5.13).	83
4.16 Changes in basal alpha-amylase activity during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.12 and A6.13).	84
4.17 Changes in alpha-amylase response during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars superimposed within each of three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A5.14 and A5.15).	90
4.18 Changes in alpha-amylase response during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars across three environments. (Tests of significance amongst cultivars are presented in appendices A6.14 and A6.15).	91

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
2.1 ANOVA for a single environment	24
2.2 ANOVA for pooled environments	24
3.1 Environmental variables	28
3.2 Curves describing the development in time of nine characters over three environments	35
4.1 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> within three environments describing changes in <u>moisture content</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	42
4.1.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	42
4.1.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	42
4.1.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	42
4.2 Regressed estimates of days <sup>1</sup> to harvest ripeness (12½% moisture content) within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	43
4.3 Estimated statistics of final curves within three environments describing changes in <u>grain dry-weight</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars.	48
4.3.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa).	48
4.3.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa).	48
4.3.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	48
4.4 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> within three environments describing development of <u>pigmentation</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	53
4.4.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	53
4.4.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	53
4.4.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	53
4.5 Regressed estimates of days from anthesis at 50% pigment formation within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars.	54
4.6 Stage of grain development at which 50% of pigment was formed with respect to harvest ripeness (P50/HR) <sup>1</sup>	55
4.7 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> within three environments describing changes in <u>flavan-3-ol concentration</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	60
4.7.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	60
4.7.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	60
4.7.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	60

## LIST OF TABLES (Cont.)

Table	Page
4.8 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> in three environments describing changes in <u>germination</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	65
4.8.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	65
4.8.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	65
4.8.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	65
4.9 Regressed estimates of germination at harvest ripeness within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	66
4.10 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> in three environments describing changes in <u>embryo maturity</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	71
4.10.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	71
4.10.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	71
4.10.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	71
4.11 Regressed estimates of embryo maturity at harvest ripeness (12½% moisture content) within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	72
4.12 Regressed estimates at time (days from anthesis) of 50% embryo maturity (M50) amongst six wheat cultivars within three environments	73
4.13 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> in three environments describing changes in <u>embryo dormancy</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars	79
4.13.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	79
4.13.2 Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	79
4.13.3 Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	79
4.14 Regressed estimates of embryo "dormancy" at harvest ripeness (12½% moisture content) within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	80
4.15 Regressed estimates at time (days from anthesis) of 50% embryo "dormancy" (D50) amongst six wheat cultivars within three environments	81
4.16 Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> within three environments describing changes in <u>basal alpha-amylase activity</u> during grain development amongst six wheat genotypes.	86
4.16.1 Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	86
Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	86
Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	86
4.17 Regressed estimates of basal alpha-amylase levels at harvest ripeness (12½% moisture content) within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	87



## LIST OF TABLES (Cont.)

Table		Page
4.18	Estimated statistics of final curves <sup>1</sup> within three environments describing changes in <u>alpha amylase response</u> during grain development amongst six wheat cultivars.	93
4.18.1	Environment I (18-12°C; 1.0 kPa)	93
4.18.2	Environment II (18-12°C; 0.4 kPa)	93
4.18.3	Environment III (30-20°C; 1.0 kPa)	
4.19	Regressed estimates of alpha-amylase response at harvest ripeness (12½% moisture content) within three environments amongst six wheat cultivars	94
5.1	Estimated dormant periods (D50-M50) amongst six wheat cultivars within three environments	111

## SUMMARY

Six wheat cultivars exhibiting a range in susceptibility to sprouting damage were subjected to three artificially controlled environments. Nine characters thought to be involved with sprouting damage were examined. The characters of interest were: dehydration rate (harvest ripeness), grain weight, the red-grained pigment (phlobaphene) and one of its precursors (flavan-3-ol), germination, embryo maturity, embryo dormancy, basal alpha amylase and alpha amylase response to germinable conditions.

Results indicated that lack of germination following standard International Seed Testing procedures (Anon., 1966, 1976) may not be appropriate as an indication of dormancy in all environmental conditions. Lack of germination may be due to embryo immaturity or to embryo dormancy. At cooler temperatures, embryo maturity was delayed well past harvest ripeness, and at this point true dormancy appeared to have been lost. Examination of the synchrony between embryo maturity and impedence to germination was considered important when examining dormancy. The difference between these two characters appeared to be the most reliable estimate of actual dormancy. Other traits investigated had poor synchrony with true dormancy. Different environments markedly affected the synchrony of embryo immaturity, dormancy and harvest ripeness. The role of anoxia, hormonal balance and other catabolic enzymes involved in early germination were reviewed, and it was suggested that these factors may prove useful in future research

into the sprouting damage problem.

Chapter one : INTRODUCTION

Sprouting damage may occur when wet weather initiates germination processes in unharvested grain, with subsequent deterioration in breadmaking quality. It is a potential hazard to wheat growing regions throughout the world, e.g. Europe (Olered, 1967; Belderok, 1968), Australia (Moss, et al., 1972) and New Zealand (Sanders, 1974; McEwan, 1976a).

Seed dormancy is usually accepted as being related in some way to resistance to sprouting damage (e.g. Belderok, 1968a); that is, dormancy may be associated with lack of catabolic processes in the endosperm (Ching, 1972; Leshem, 1973; Villiers, 1972). Several enzymes initiated during the germination process are involved in the degradation of the starch and protein of the endosperm. These enzymes include alpha-amylase, which break the branch chain amylopectin starch molecules to dextrans and amylases, and beta-amylase which degrade these smaller compounds to low molecular weight dextrans and maltose (Kent-Jones and Amos, 1967; Pyler, 1969). Beta-amylase is present in the sound grain but its activity is restricted, as there are relatively few exo-groups at which this enzyme is capable of hydrolysing (Kent-Jones and Amos, 1967; Pyler, 1969). Alpha-amylase appears a major factor in starch dextrinisation, and levels of this enzyme relate to the degree of sprout damage (Johansson, 1976; Olered, 1967; Moss et al., 1972). Other enzymes may also be involved in early germination, such as proteolytic

enzymes (Gordon, 1975; Kruger, 1976). In sprout damaged wheat, the increased level of starch dextrinisation results in an inferior loaf (Olered, 1967; Pyler, 1967; Moss et al., 1972). The loaf is reduced in volume, has a grey and sticky crumb, and a dark crust colour (Olered, 1967; Kent-Jones and Amos, 1968; Pyler, 1969; McDermott, 1971). Sprout damaged grain may also have a lighter bushel or test weight (Ghaderi and Everson, 1971; Fouler and de la Roche, 1975), and lowered milling yield (Belderok, 1968; McEwan, 1959).

Breeding for sprout resistance involves recognition of usable genetic parameters. The relationship between grain colour and pre-harvest sprouting tendency is well documented (e.g. Gfeller and Svejda, 1960; Kimber, 1971) : white grained wheats being susceptible to sprouting, while the red grained wheats exhibit varying degrees of dormancy. However, not all wheats have a sufficiently long enough dormant period to offer reliable crop protection. Other parameters may include : (1) reducing the sensitivity of the aleurone cells to gibberellic acid, (2) selectively inactivating alpha-amylase response to germinable conditions, and (3) identification of the role of specific proteolytic enzymes involved in early germination (Bhatt, et al., 1976; Gale, 1976; Kruger and Preston, 1976). Recent field studies (Gordon, 1975) suggested that enzymes other than amylases may have marked influences on wheat endosperm degradation during early germination.

The present investigation investigates suggestions of earlier work (Gordon, 1975) but taken over a wider genotypic sample and number of environments with particular reference to the magnitude of the genotype environmental interaction. The characters of interest were the red grain pigment (phlobaphene) and one of its precursors (flavan-3-ol), germination, embryo maturity and dormancy, basal alpha-amylase and alpha-amylase response to environmental conditions conducive towards germination, grain weight, and harvest ripeness. Six cultivars were stratified random samples that offered contrasting susceptibilities to pre-harvest sprouting. The strata were : white-grained and red-grained cultivars. Their response in characters relevant to sprouting damage were followed in three climatically controlled laboratories.