

# Co-evolution of virulence and resistance in heterogeneous wheat populations

XXIII International Workshop on Bunt and Smut Diseases

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## Abstract text

In a population of wheat with diverse genetic composition, natural selection will favour resistant varieties as susceptible lines will produce less seed. On the other hand, there will also be a selection pressure towards more spores with virulence to the resistance genes within the population. Little is known about the dynamics between these two forces in the co-evolution between resistance and virulence.

## Materials and methods

8 mixtures were composed of wheat lines with known resistance genes. Each mixture included from one to 6 different resistance genes. Each mixture was contaminated with a race of common bunt (*Tilletia caries*) with virulence to one of the resistance genes in the mixture. Each year, the infection level in the field was recorded, and grain and spores were harvested and resown.

## Results and discussion

Over a four year period of regrowing mixtures, the infection level of common bunt gradually decreased, demonstrating that selection towards resistance in the mixture dominates over selection for virulence in the fungal spores. However, after four years, bunt infection was still detectable in most mixtures, also in mixtures with a high degree of diversity in resistance genes. The bunt selection pressure in the experiment was much higher than what would be acceptable in commercial agriculture conditions. The experiment can therefore only explain dominating tendencies over time, and cannot be recommended as a strategy to control common bunt for practical farming.

In the last year of the experiment, the mixtures were also contaminated with new spores of the initial race instead of the spores from the previous year. This resulted in a decreased infection level compared with spores from natural selection. This demonstrates that some selection and adaptation to the wheat resistance has taken place, and the mixtures had become more resistant to primary infection from external spores.