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Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available at: 11577/3314782 since: 2019-11-14T13:28:45Z

Publisher:

Published version:

DOI:

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TRANSFER OF A MAJOR QTL FOR RESISTANCE TO FUSARIUM HEAD BLIGHT FROM *THINOPYRUM ELONGATUM* ONTO DURUM WHEAT 7AL CHROMOSOME ARM AND ITS PYRAMIDING WITH OTHER USEFUL GENES FROM *TH. PONTICUM*

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alien gene transfer, chromosome engineering, Triticum, scab, marker-assisted selection

Fusarium Head Blight (FHB), also called scab, a major wheat disease worldwide, has in recent years become a threat also in uncommon cultivation areas of bread and durum wheat. The lack of efficient and durable sources of resistance within adapted durum wheat germplasm is particularly alarming. In fact, durum wheat is used almost exclusively for human consumption, and Fusarium attacks, besides causing severe yield losses, pose a high risk of kernel contamination with health-dangerous mycotoxins, notably deoxynivalenol (DON). To cope with this scenario, looking outside of the primary gene pool and exploring exotic variability harboured within related Triticeae species, appears as a worth strategy. We recently mapped an exceptionally effective QTL for FHB resistance (provisional designation *Fhb-7EL*) onto the telomeric portion of the 7EL chromosome arm of diploid *Thinopyrum elongatum*, and pyramided it with other useful genes from the 7e1L arm of decaploid *Th. ponticum* (*Lr19*, *Yp*, yield related traits) onto the 7DL arm of bread wheat-*Thinopyrum* recombinant lines (Ceoloni et al. TAG, in press). Two such FHB resistant recombinants, having distal 70% of their 7DL replaced by chromatin of the two *Thinopyrum* species in slightly different relative proportions, were crossed with two previously developed durum wheat-*Th. ponticum* recombinants, having 23% and 28% of their 7AL arm replaced by 7e1L chromatin, respectively. In the shared 7e1L region between the bread wheat (6x) and durum wheat (4x) parental recombinant types, including in all cases the *Lr19* gene, homologous pairing evidently occurred with high frequency (over 70%), as proved by GISH-based analysis of meiotic pairing of 5x F₁'s. As a result, new 7EL-7e1L recombinant types could be isolated in the BC₁ generation to durum wheat. Selection for desired recombinants, i.e. those involving chromosome 7A and with a total *Thinopyrum* spp. (7EL+7e1L) chromatin not exceeding the 28% of the arm, was carried out by a panel of user-friendly PCR-based markers. To accelerate reduction of chromosome number to the euploid 2n=28, *in vitro* culture of BC₂ embryos was carried out. Selected heterozygous recombinant plants, most of them having reached a stable chromosomal condition, were selfed and in the BC₂F₂ progeny homozygous genotypes were isolated. The latter were challenged by *Fusarium graminearum* spike inoculation, to verify the efficacy of the *Fhb-7EL* QTL once inserted into a durum wheat background. Compared to highly susceptible control plants, inoculation outcomes confirmed what previously observed at the bread wheat level, with remarkable reduction of disease severity, averaging over 90%, invariably associated with presence of the *Fhb-7EL* QTL. Thus, what is considered to be by far the most effective resistance to FHB available, is now readily exploitable in breeding to provide protection against this threatening disease, hence substantially enhancing food security and safety of the bread and durum wheat crop, in Italy and worldwide.