

Syngenta expands Australian Seedcare Institute to develop next generation of biologicals

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Wagga Wagga facility to test biological products for drought, heat, nutrient efficiency and plant health under Australian growing conditions



Syngenta is expanding its Seedcare Institute at Charles Sturt University's Agri Park in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, to take on a much larger role in the development and evaluation of agricultural biologicals as interest in nature-based crop technologies accelerates in Australia. Established in 2018 to improve the safety and effectiveness of seed treatment application, the facility will now broaden its mandate to include biological products designed to help crops cope with drought and heat, improve nutrient use efficiency, control pests and strengthen plant health.

The expansion reflects a significant change in the role biologicals are expected to play in agriculture. Rather than being viewed simply as alternatives to conventional crop protection products, biologicals are increasingly being developed alongside established chemistry as another set of tools for managing crop performance. For Syngenta ANZ, the investment is also about answering a practical question before products reach growers: whether a biological developed elsewhere can perform under Australian conditions.

Garth Wickson, Head of Seedcare and Plant Health at Syngenta ANZ, said the company wants the expanded facility to give Australian growers earlier access to biological solutions that have been tested locally. "Our aim is to test and evaluate these technologies under local conditions to answer the question that matters to growers: 'Will it work here, in this field, in this season?'" Wickson said. That emphasis on local testing is important in biologicals because performance can be influenced by factors such as soil conditions, temperature, moisture and the interaction between the product and the crop environment. A product that performs well in one market may require different application strategies or show different results under another set of conditions.

Syngenta has invested in an environmentally controlled growth room equipped with a thermogradient table and expanded growth shelving. The new setup will allow researchers to test biological and seed treatment products across different soil

temperatures and other environmental variables. The company is also adding equipment to the institute's existing laboratories, increasing their capacity for biological product evaluation and development.

The first product scheduled for testing at the expanded facility is Atuva, a nitrogen-fixing inoculant intended for chickpeas, faba beans and lentils. Inoculants such as Atuva are designed to support the relationship between crops and beneficial microorganisms, with the potential to improve nitrogen availability and crop performance. Testing the product at Wagga Wagga will provide Syngenta with an opportunity to assess its performance under conditions relevant to Australian pulse production.

The decision to start with a nitrogen-fixing inoculant also reflects the wider range of applications that biologicals are beginning to cover. The category includes products derived from or inspired by nature, including microorganisms, natural molecules, plant extracts and other biological materials. For growers, the attraction is not necessarily replacing one product with another. Biologicals can potentially address specific problems such as nutrient efficiency, stress tolerance or biological pest control and can be used alongside conventional crop protection products.

Syngenta's expansion comes as the company pursues a larger global role in biologicals. It has invested in Europe and the United States to acquire biological technologies and expand manufacturing capabilities. The company expects the global agricultural biologicals market to exceed \$20 billion by 2030, with Australia positioned to benefit as adoption increases across horticulture and broadacre agriculture.

Australia offers a particularly relevant testing ground for these technologies because growers operate across a wide range of climates and production systems. Drought, heat and soil variability can create difficult conditions for crops, while farmers are also under pressure to use nutrients and other inputs more efficiently. A product that can demonstrate consistent performance under those conditions could have value well beyond a single crop or region.

The expanded Wagga Wagga facility is intended to provide Syngenta with a local testing base while also connecting Australian researchers and growers with the company's wider biologicals programme. "We will work closely with our global team to source promising biological products," Wickson said. The move effectively changes the identity and scope of the facility from the Seedcare Institute to the Seedcare and Biologicals Institute.

For Syngenta, the shift is not simply about increasing the number of biological products in its portfolio. The company wants to understand how these products can fit into existing farming systems and work alongside conventional crop protection technologies. "Expanding to become The Seedcare and Biologicals Institute is a game-changer," Wickson said. "We aren't just adding products to a portfolio; we are providing the agronomic expertise to understand how biologicals complement and enhance conventional chemistry."

That distinction could prove important as biologicals move from a niche part of the agricultural inputs market into a more mainstream category. Farmers ultimately need products that deliver measurable results in real production systems. Laboratory performance and controlled trials can establish a product's potential, but commercial adoption depends on whether growers see reliable results under their own conditions and can incorporate the product into existing farm practices.

The Wagga Wagga expansion is designed to shorten that distance between product development and farm-level evidence. For Syngenta ANZ, it also creates a local platform through which products emerging from the company's global biologicals programme can be evaluated before being introduced more widely to Australian growers.

The investment comes at a time when agriculture is facing simultaneous pressures to maintain productivity, manage increasingly variable weather and use inputs more efficiently. Biologicals are attracting attention because they offer additional ways to address some of those challenges, but their commercial success will ultimately depend on performance rather than the technology's promise. That is where the expanded institute could become strategically important.

By testing products against Australian soils, temperatures and production conditions, Syngenta can generate evidence that is directly relevant to growers deciding whether to adopt them. The company's goal is therefore broader than establishing another research facility. It is building a local evaluation pipeline for biological technologies, connecting global product development with the conditions in which Australian farmers actually operate.

Atuva will be the first test of the expanded capability. Other biological products could follow as Syngenta identifies technologies from its global network that have potential in the Australian market. If the programme delivers consistent results, the Wagga Wagga site could become an important link between Syngenta's international biologicals investments and Australia's agricultural sector.

For growers, the proposition is straightforward: products developed from nature need to prove that they can work in the field. Syngenta's expanded institute is intended to provide that evidence before those technologies reach a much larger commercial

audience. As Wickson put it, the objective is to make innovation something customers can "see, test, and trust." For biologicals, that may be the difference between an interesting technology and a product that farmers are willing to put into their fields.