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SCIENCE FAIR

'Designer wheat' nets top prize

SHERYL UBELACKER
The Canadian Press

TORONTO — Scott Adams never expected to take a prize in a competition for the best student biotech research projects in Canada — he was just happy to come to the nation's capital as one of 14 finalists.

But on Wednesday, the 16-year-old from Saskatoon was awarded the \$5,000 first prize in the Sanofi-Aventis BioTalent Challenge for his genetic research involving the bread-and-butter crop of his home province, wheat.

"I didn't come to Ottawa expecting a prize," said a surprised Adams. "I thought the trip to Ottawa was enough of a prize."

The Grade 10 student's project involved a novel process for turning off a gene in wheat to alter its starch elements. The discovery might one day make it possible for farmers to grow "designer wheat" with starch content aimed at different products, from tex-

tiles and packaging to flour-based foods and glues.

Adams worked with two mentors in the department of **plant sciences** at the University of Saskatchewan on the gene-silencing research.

While genetics is one of his areas of interest — he reads scientific journals on the subject — he doesn't know if he will pursue science as a career.

Adams and second-prize winner Joseph McNeil, an 18-year-old, Grade 12 student in Cape Breton, N.S., will compete for Canada at the International BioGENEius Challenge in Atlanta next month.

McNeil was awarded the \$4,000 runner-up prize for using antioxidant compounds like those found in green tea to promote growth of nerve cells in a study related to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

He is hoping to attend Dalhousie University in Halifax next year, possibly in its biological engineering program.

