

R&D appropriability and planned obsolescence: empirical evidence from wheat breeding in the UK (1960–1995)

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Abstract

Plant breeders face a unique appropriation problem—plants are reproducible, genetic information is heritable and seeds can be multiplied. The paper uses varietal age as a proxy for durability to examine planned obsolescence strategies in UK wheat breeding. Market-weighted age fell from 13 years (1960s) to 5.5 years (1990s). This fall is on account of increased varietal proliferation and breeding strategies that focus on incremental productivity improvements (i.e. increased efficiency) and narrow and limited disease resistance (i.e. reduced durability).

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