

## Plant science industry leads the way in countering desertification “World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought”

**Friday 17 June 2011** – On the *World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought*, CropLife Australia, as the nation’s peak body for the plant science industry today calls on government to ensure that the plant science industry and Australia’s farming sector are supported in their ongoing, world leading efforts in countering desertification and combating drought. With urban populations growing by two people every second, farmers must produce more food while also protecting the environment.

“Australian farmers are all too familiar with the havoc that drought can cause to their livelihood. After a decade of drought, followed by floods for many, the challenge of producing more food has never been so difficult. We need the Australian Government to support our farmers in their requirement for modern farming tools”, said CropLife Australia Chief Executive Officer, Matthew Cossey.

From modern plant varieties that produce higher yields, to the adoption of conservation tillage that preserves soil moisture, plant science innovations are already leading progress on global water conservation efforts, and hold tremendous potential for the future. According to the United Nations, a one per cent increase in water productivity in food production alone can make up to an extra 24 litres of water available per person per day.

“Thanks in large part to the many advances we’ve made in plant sciences, we’re able to grow ‘more crop per drop’— meaning farmers can produce food using less water”, said Mr Cossey. “Continuing these advancements will be critical as our planet faces increasing water scarcity due to a rising population, climate change and unpredictable environmental extremes such flood and drought”.

Enhanced crop varieties, modern crop protection products and new farming techniques are helping plants grow and thrive on less water, as well as be more resistant to pests and diseases, which is helping advance water conservation efforts. A study in the United States, for example, found that 50,000 fewer gallons of water are needed to grow an irrigated acre of corn today compared to twenty years ago. One acre of irrigated cotton requires about 30 per cent less water than two decades ago.

Biotech traits that enable plants to cope with drought and other water related stresses are another innovation that offers great potential to improving water use efficiency. Australian researchers have developed biotech crops that yield 20 per cent more food than existing varieties in drought conditions and crops that can thrive in salty soils, which are otherwise prone to desertification. The first drought-tolerant crops are expected to be commercialised in the United States by 2012 and in sub-Saharan Africa by 2017. Scientists expect corn with drought tolerance to produce about two million more tonnes of food under moderate drought conditions, meaning an additional 14 to 21 million people could be fed.

“The plant science industry is committed to providing farmers with the technology and knowledge they need to optimise yields and increase water efficiency, and to continuing partnerships to help ensure these tools reach those who need it most”, said Mr Cossey.

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### About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife represents the innovators, developers, manufacturers, formulators and registrants of crop protection and agro-biotechnology products. The plant science industry provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies that are key to the nation’s agricultural productivity, sustainability and food security. The plant science industry is worth more than \$1.5 billion a year to the Australian economy and directly employs thousands of people across the country. CropLife member companies spend more than \$13 million a year on stewardship activities to ensure the safe use of their products on the environment and human health. CropLife ensures the responsible use of these products through its industry code of conduct and has set a benchmark for industry stewardship through programs such as *drumMUSTER*, ChemClear® and Agsafe Accreditation and Training.