

PLANT SCIENCE KEY TO EASING IMPACTS OF DROUGHT AND DESERTIFICATION

17 June 2012 (Canberra) – Innovation in plant science is crucial to a long term solution to combating Desertification and Drought. On this important World Day, we are reminded of the need for government, industry and the public research sector to work together to find innovative solutions that help the world's farmers adapt to drier conditions and grow food more sustainably.

According to the United Nations, a one per cent increase in water efficiency in food production alone can make up to an extra 24 litres of water available per person per day.

CropLife Australia's Chief Executive Officer, Matthew Cossey said today, "Plant science and technologies are critical to the conservation of natural resources including land and water. The plant science industry is working to improve the capacity of a broad range of crops to grow in harsher climates and use less water. For example, Australian researchers have developed locally-adapted biotechnology crops that can produce up to 20 per cent more food than existing varieties in drought conditions, as well as crops that can thrive in increasingly salty soils.

"Enhanced crop genetics, modern agricultural chemistry products and new farming techniques are helping plants grow and thrive on less water", said Mr Cossey. "Continuing these advancements will be essential as our planet faces increasing water scarcity due to unpredictable environmental extremes as a result of climate change and a rising population."

Drought tolerant crops are currently being trialed across the world. The first drought-tolerant varieties are expected to be commercialised in the United States by 2013 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 14 to 21 million fewer people will go hungry.

Agriculture accounts for 70 per cent of fresh water used globally, and global food demand continues to grow. 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 great potential for the future.

CropLife and its members teach stewardship techniques to Australian farmers each year to help them use crop protection products responsibly, enabling optimal use of natural resources. A study in the United States found that the water required to grow one acre of irrigated cotton requires about 30 per cent less water than twenty years ago.

"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", concluded Mr Cossey.

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia (CropLife) is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife represents the innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and agricultural 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 and its members are committed to the stewardship of their products throughout their lifecycle and to ensuring that human health, environment and trade issues associated with agricultural chemical use in Australia are responsibly and sustainably managed. Our member companies spend more than \$13 million a year on stewardship activities to ensure the safe and effective use of their products. CropLife ensures the responsible use of these products through its mandatory industry code of conduct and has set a benchmark for industry stewardship through programs such as drumMUSTER, ChemClea® and Agsafe Accreditation and Training. Our stewardship activities demonstrate our commitment to managing the impacts associated with container waste and unwanted chemicals.

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