
Global report puts plant breeding innovation at the forefront of food security

17 December 2021 (Canberra) - The latest independent report published by the International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-Biotech Applications (ISAAA) highlights the importance of new breeding innovations to meet global food security and sustainability needs.

The report outlines the importance for the acceleration of new precision breeding innovations like gene editing. This is being driven by the need to address impacts of climate change, drought frequency and to reduce food waste and the environmental footprint of production.

At the same time, the world will need to produce 50 per cent more food by 2050 to feed the world's population with the same or even fewer natural resources.

Matthew Cossey, Chief Executive Officer of CropLife Australia, said Australian farmers will need access to all the best tools to get there, "The ISAAA report marks 25 years of successful commercial genetically modified (GM) crop cultivation in Australia. Innovative, safe and approved technologies like GM crops have played a significant role in developing Australian farming systems, enabling farmers to be more environmentally sustainable, reduce their carbon footprint and protect the health of their soil.

"The report confirms the agriculture environment is changing faster than conventional breeding techniques would allow for the establishment of new varieties. Access to new and evolving breeding innovations will be crucial to increasing global food production and meeting sustainability targets for the future. To achieve this we need a modern future proofed regulatory system."

Most countries who have adopted crop biotechnology innovations early are well equipped to realise the potential of new breeding techniques and capitalise on their benefits. The report explores current examples of where gene editing innovation is being used to develop drought tolerance, disease resistance and increased water efficiency and nutritional value.

Mr Cossey continued, "All mainland states in Australia have now lifted their GM crop moratorium, allowing farmers to take full advantage of plant breeding innovations, remain globally competitive and more environmentally sustainable."

However, the ISAAA report highlights that as new breeding techniques emerge, their regulation must be fit for purpose, science based, risk proportionate and separates process from the end product. This is something that the Commonwealth Department of Health needs to ensure is addressed as part of the modernisation of the gene technology regulatory system.

"Responsive, science-based regulation will ensure Australia isn't held back from reaping the benefits and continuing its position as a world leader in agricultural innovation," Mr Cossey concluded.

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia is the national peak industry organisation representing the plant science sector in Australia. CropLife's members are the world-leading innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and crop biotechnology products. The plant science industry, worth more than \$20 billion a year to Australian agricultural production, provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies key to the nation's agricultural productivity, profitability and sustainability. CropLife is part of the plant science industry's 91 country international federation.

