
Plant science on the frontline of defence for plant health

12 May 2023 (Canberra) – Plants are a source of the oxygen we breathe, much of the food we eat, the fibres that make our clothes and natural building materials. Yet, up to 40 per cent of food crops are lost in-field, before harvest, due to insect pests and plant diseases every year. This International Day of Plant Health raises awareness of the impact of these pests on food security, the environment and economic development. Addressing this challenge is at the core to the mission of the plant science sector and fundamental to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals to reduce global hunger and protect the environment.

“Invasive pest species are one of the main drivers of crop and biodiversity loss. Ecosystem migration as a result of climate change means that more insect pests and diseases are appearing earlier and in places they were never seen before. This will continue to become a major challenge to conserving and protecting both native habitats and agricultural production,” said Chief Executive Officer of CropLife Australia, the national peak industry organisation for the plant science sector, Mr Matthew Cossey.


The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) estimate that agricultural production must rise by about 60 per cent by 2050 to feed our growing global population. One example of pests compromising this is a swarm of 40 million Desert Locust, which could eat the same amount of food in one day as about 35,000 people. Likewise, the Fall armyworm is one of the most destructive crop pests in the world, devastating global supplies of 80 different kinds of crops, including wheat, maize, and sorghum. Its arrival in Australia in 2020 means we cannot let our guard down.

“Our industry’s products are used on the frontline of biosecurity operations in defending plant health and protecting natural environments. These products restrict the spread of invasive weeds on farming land and in our national parks as well as counter the risks posed to farming by insect pests and diseases. These challenges will only be further exacerbated in the face of climate change, which also threatens crop yield and food security. Growing healthy plants also ensures that harvested product is free from disease and safe for human consumption,” said Mr Cossey.

The plant science industry also invests in the development of new plant varieties that can grow in changing and challenging environments. New breeding techniques enabled by biotechnology innovation are providing crops that can withstand pest and environmental stressors like drought or are resistant to insect damage.

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.



“Plant health is key to achieving global sustainability targets and reinforces the need for policy and regulation that is informed by science and enables farmer access to the important tools and products of the plant science industry required to adapt and respond to the ever-increasing challenge of sustainably producing food,” concluded Mr Cossey.

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