

Post-Conference Press Summary

Addressing the World's Food Needs Debated at CropLife International's 2004 Annual Conference

Brussels, 11 June 2004 --- More than 160 influential stakeholders in global agriculture and food production from around the world met at CropLife International's annual conference in Brussels, Belgium on 3 June 2004 to discuss the role and contribution of the Plant Science Industry in meeting the world's food needs.

Substantiating its commitment to being an accessible, communicative open organisation, CropLife invited speakers from diverse sectors including critics of the industry. The one-day, internationally-oriented event brought together leaders from academia, international organizations, non-governmental organisations, think tanks and technology foundations to provide an array of perspectives on important issues for the plant science industry, including regulation, development, consumers, technology and trade.

Setting the scene

In his welcome address to the conference, Michael Pragnell, President of CropLife International and CEO of Syngenta said, "Our industry is committed to providing the tools necessary to meet the world's food needs through sustainable agriculture. We are passionate about the need to have our hard-won, painstakingly-tested technologies used wisely and sustainably." He went on, "We recognize the importance of engaging in transparent and constructive dialogue with stakeholders to promote mutual understanding and move forward to addressing the challenges we all face."

Keynote address – Rice is Life

On the occasion of the United Nations' International Year of Rice, the keynote lecture on Sustainable Rice in the 21st Century and Beyond was given by one of the "Fathers" of the Green Revolution, Dr. Gurdev Khush. Rice is an extremely important crop supplying 23% of the world's calories, more than any other crop. It is the staple food of some 3 billion people worldwide. Dr. Khush described how development of new rice varieties and technologies during the Green Revolution resulted in significant increases in productivity that avoided severe food shortages, particularly in Asia. However, productivity needs to rise by 50% over the next 20 years to feed the growing population.

Dr. Khush outlined strategies for closing the rice crop yield gap – the difference between potential yield and actual yields obtained - to produce more food and also the use of genetics to improve nutritional value of rice that could, for example, help alleviate vitamin A deficiency amongst vulnerable groups.

After the keynote speech came two lively panel discussions on the topics of Protecting consumers and ensuring choice, and of addressing the needs of the south.

The Panel Sessions

The theme of communication and cooperation permeated the event with calls for more dialogue and debate on the issues and a joint commitment to helping the poor and vulnerable sections of Society.

Some of the main points presented and debated are summarized below:

Protecting Consumers and Ensuring Choice

- Innovation and proper regulation are necessary to keep up with the increasing food and fibre demands of the world's growing population. Bringing these innovations to market requires appropriate, science-based regulation.
(Michael Pragnell, CropLife International and Syngenta)
- Ensuring consumer safety is the most essential element of food regulation
- International science-based standards should provide equal trading opportunities. The development of such regulations will take substantial investment
(Jørgen Schlundt, World Health Organization)

- National regulations and excessive bureaucracies have become barriers to trade and regulatory capture is hindering adoption of new technologies
(*Kendra Okonski, International Policy Network*)
- Resistance from the public, food crises and concerns about industrial farming and globalisation explained the collapse of the 'Life Sciences' project
- The processes for gaining a formal understanding of risk in the public domain include:
 - Qualitative dimensions of risk
 - Aversion to uncertainty
 - Asymmetry of gains and losses
 - What is truth? – What is a convincing argument?
 - Personal and cultural values influencing risk identification and risk tolerance
(*George Gaskell, London School of Economics*)
- Consumer perception of safety is as important as the reality and is one of the most important factors in food regulation
- The food industry is actively supporting the development of sustainable agriculture practices through the creation of the Sustainable Agriculture Initiative foundation for mainstream agriculture
(*Eduard Bruckner, Nestlé*)
- There is a change in the balance of power in the European food market: consumers have become more dominant
- Products now have to go beyond minimum standards of safety to meet other requirements, such as good value, availability, and variety
(*Lord Christopher Haskins, former Chairman of Northern Foods*)
- Industry must listen to the concerns of consumers and address them clearly, by managing expectations and building trust. More open communication with all relevant stakeholders is a step in the right direction for the plant science industry
- Hazard vs. outrage:
 - Hazard describes the biological component of a food or environmental risk (magnitude and probability of harm occurring), and...
 - Outrage: describes the subjective attributes of a risk that determine how worried or angry it tends to make people
(*Edward Groth, former Senior Scientist at the Consumer Union of the United States*)

Addressing the Needs of the South:

- Scientists in developing countries should get better access to published literature; that knowledge about agrochemical products and technologies should be conveyed in a way that would encourage its effective adoption in the Third World
- Global research should be enriched and guided by farmers' knowledge and needs and should be disseminated
(*Denis Blight, CAB International*)
- The use of GM crops in developing countries could reduce poverty, increase the availability of food, improve health and respond to environmental challenges.
- But only if technology is shared, 'humanitarian' licences are considered, decision-making processes are supported and liability agreements published
(*Harald Schmidt, Nuffield Council on Bioethics*)
- Forging collaboration between the public and private sectors to identify proprietary technologies that can address the problems of resource poor farmers
(*Phelix Majiwa, African Agricultural Technology Foundation*)
- Genetic diversity underpins agriculture and food security around the world.
- Public-private partnerships may also be effective in addressing the urgent, global need to safeguard genetic diversity.
(*Geoffrey Hawtin, Global Crop Diversity Trust*)

- Biotechnology is not a "magic bullet" to poverty - which is really about economics and power, and not access to technologies.
- (Calling for) the implementation of a multilateral trading system with fair rules - poor countries should not be forced to liberalise at the same speed as rich countries, especially where it damages food security

(Jeremy Hobbs, Oxfam International)

Water and Food production – More Food per Drop

Prior to the opening of the conference, CropLife International held a panel discussion linking the issues of water and food production. The panel was made up of experts on the subject from the Stockholm International Water Institute, the International Water Management Institute, CropLife International and the European Crop Protection Association.

Irrigated agriculture accounts for some 70% of all water use. Just a 1% increase in water productivity in food production could potentially make available 24 litres of water a day per head of population. Water management is becoming one of the key collective challenges to achieving sustainable development worldwide and food security in particular.

Conclusion

"We have been successful in once again bringing together a variety of viewpoints to trigger lively and thought-provoking debate, that might make a small contribution towards moving the debate forward on sustainable solutions to addressing the world's food needs," stated Christian Verschueren, Director General, CropLife International.

A detailed summary of the Conference, as well as the speaker presentations are available on CropLife International's website www.croplife.org/Annual_Conference_2004

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Note to Editors:

CropLife International is the global federation representing the plant science industry. It supports a network of regional and national associations in 88 countries, and is led by companies such as BASF, Bayer CropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont, FMC, Monsanto, Sumitomo and Syngenta. CropLife International promotes the benefits of crop protection and biotechnology products, their importance to sustainable agriculture and food production, and their responsible use through stewardship activities. The Plant Science Industry has reiterated its call to governments worldwide for a consistent and science-based regulatory framework for the research and use of its products in agriculture and the food and feed chain.

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