

Press Release – World Water Day

CropLife International Hails UN Decade of Action for Water

Plant Science Technologies Help Conserve Water in Agriculture

Brussels, 22 March 2005 -- On the occasion of the United Nation's World Water Day 2005, CropLife International pledges to continue its work in helping to address the challenges surrounding water use in agriculture.

Agriculture accounts for some 70% of all water use globally - by far the largest consumer. Most of this use is from irrigation - and the number of irrigated hectares is expected to further increase by 20% over the next thirty years. While major water savings in agriculture will have to come from improved irrigation systems, the research-and development-driven plant science industry recognizes that its products and technologies have a significant role to play in making agricultural water use more efficient while at the same time increasing productivity.

"Industry is stepping up to the water challenge by providing products and technologies that contribute to water use efficiency and water quality protection, which are key to sustainable agriculture," stated Christian Verschueren, Director General, CropLife International. "Improved land and water management techniques increase water use efficiency. Moreover, improved crop varieties, especially those that are more tolerant to drought or excessive salt in the soil, enable or enhance production in areas where food production is difficult, or where yields are low with prevailing technologies.

Some examples of crop management or crop research strategies to improve the efficiency of water use in the agricultural sector include:

- Limiting or eliminating soil tillage in agriculture improves the land's ability to capture and retain moisture. This practice is enabled through the use of herbicides to manage weeds. As a result of no-till practices, farmers in many countries optimize their yields and are better off than farmers who did not use this practice. **In Ghana, no-till farmers obtained maize yields that were 45% higher than farmers who did not use this technology during normal years. In a dry year such as 2000, the yield was 48% higher.**
- Herbicides also help increase a crop's access to water, by reducing the weeds that compete for moisture and use of scarce water resources - resulting in "more crop per drop." In the Philippines, new rice production systems enabled through innovative weed control has **reduced water consumption by one-fifth**. This is particularly critical as rice is the most water intensive crop, with as much as 5000 litres of water needed to produce 1 kilogram of rice.
- Enhanced crop varieties also help plants economise water consumption. It is estimated that the accumulated damage to a crop from stresses such as drought and heat can reduce yields by 30-70%. **Drought tolerant plants may substantially decrease a crop's water needs and result in less water consumption.** Both the public and private sector are involved in research to develop new crop varieties, bred traditionally or through plant biotechnology.
- Good agricultural practices and product stewardship is fundamental to water protection and preservation. By engaging in partnerships, the plant science industry's stewardship activities seek to protect water quality by **reducing soil erosion, avoiding run-off of crop protection products, and increasing wildlife habitat** as part of a holistic farm or land management approach. Throughout Europe, for example, the plant science industry has teamed up with farmers and water utility companies to protect water areas and inform farmers regarding application timing, amount, and choice of a crop protection product.

"It is vital that the private sector, the public sector and civil society work together in partnership to undertake such activities to preserve our world's natural resources. Just a 1% increase in water productivity in food production could potentially make available 24 litres of water a day per head of

population. Our industry has a vital role to play in achieving such savings," stated Christian Verschueren.

The United Nations celebrates World Water Day each year on March 22. This year marks the launch of the International Decade for Action, "Water for Life" 2005-2015. CropLife International has launched a dedicated webpage highlighting the plant science industry's activities with regard to water conservation, use efficiency and protection (www.croplife.org/water). It is also planning a series of events to commemorate the Decade throughout 2005 and in coming years.

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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 87 countries, 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.

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