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MEDIA RELEASE

CropLife International sees dialogue on intellectual property as vital to protecting innovation and ensuring food security

CropLife International took the first steps on a programme of dialogue last week by holding its first workshop on the 21st century management of intellectual property in the plant science industry. The workshop, held in Geneva on 20th March, was attended by industry members and stakeholders from intergovernmental organizations, farmers and NGOs.

The delegates gathered to review the challenges faced by plant science companies in their management of intellectual property regarding agrochemicals and agbiotechnology. The workshop began with a keynote address by Bernward Garthoff, member of the Board of Bayer CropScience who highlighted the complexity of intellectual property issues for the plant science industry with its broad technology portfolio and recent developments in biotechnology. "The dilemma of protecting innovation whilst facilitating access to technologies for farmers worldwide is a particularly important aspect of this issue," said Garthoff.

Presentations were heard from representatives of various national and international governmental organizations dealing with intellectual property such as the United Kingdom's IPR Commission, the EU Commission's DG Trade, the Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

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As well as addressing some of the international mechanisms to deal with intellectual property in agriculture, the workshop heard from the NGO Action Aid and the American Soybean Association who broadened the agenda from a purely legal and technical basis to include more social and political elements.

Ruchi Tripathi, Food Trade Policy Analyst from Action Aid was particularly concerned with the increasing concentration within the plant science industry and the rights of farmers in developing countries to save and sell seeds. Bart Ruth, Chairman of the American Soybean Association, and a farmer himself, outlined the advantages of strong intellectual property rules for providing farmers with effective products, such as seeds or agrochemicals, which increase their yields and profits. "Farmers are willing to pay the extra costs attached to a patented product if it improves their businesses," explained Bart. "A strong legal framework for intellectual property means more innovation from the private sector and thus better seeds and better yields."

The final session of the workshop saw an eminent panel of experts from academia, the legal profession and the plant science industry develop some innovative approaches to intellectual property in agriculture. Suggestions included new approaches to licensing of products in developing countries to providing capacity building assistance for the legal process of patenting innovations.

"This workshop has provided our industry with a great deal of food for thought on this very important area of intellectual property in agricultural technologies," commented Christian Verschueren, Director General of CropLife International. "This issue has many facets that affect the way our industry's technologies can, on the one hand be protected, and on the other, be made more easily available to the world's poor. Intellectual property is only one part of the equation, but an important one. How we, as an industry, approach some of these vital issues for our industry will be key to the future of the plant science industry as well as the future of agriculture in developed and developing countries.

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“A sound system of protection for intellectual property not only brings benefits for our industry but also for downstream users of our products such as farmers and ultimately consumers.”

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Notes to Editors:

CropLife International is the global federation representing the plant science industry. It supports a network of nearly 100 regional and national associations and their member companies worldwide, led by companies such as BASF, BayerCropScience, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont, FMC, Monsanto, Sumitomo and Syngenta.

CropLife International promotes the benefits of crop protection and biotechnology products and their importance to sustainable agriculture and food production.

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