Representing the Plant Science Industry

CropLife AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE

GM CROP PRODUCTIVITY SPEAKS FOR ITSELF

Thursday 20 June 2013 (Canberra) – New reports from the anti-GM lobby are becoming more and more disconnected from reality. The plant science industry is calling on consumers to look at the weight of credible, independent evidence, rather than the latest activist claims.

Matthew Cossey, CEO of CropLife Australia said today, "The same old claims about GM crops are being trotted out by the anti-GM lobby. It's an issue so frequently discussed, with so much misinformation that it can be hard for consumers and farmers to sort fact from fiction. The logic that cuts through the deception is that if GM crops really didn't work, farmers wouldn't use them.

"Yet farmers continue to adopt the technology in increasing numbers. Data on the global adoption of GM crops shows that GM technology is used by more than 16 million farmers worldwide. The global area of biotech crops has increased one hundred fold since they were first commercialised in 1996. Just last year, global adoption of GM crops increased by 6 per cent to reach 170.3 million hectares.

"If crop biotechnology had not been available to the 16.7 million farmers using the technology in 2011, maintaining global production at the 2011 levels would have required additional plantings equivalent to 33 per cent of the arable land in Australia. That's over 15 million hectares of forest and natural habitat saved by the use of crop biotechnology.

"So why are so many farmers switching to GM crops? Between 1996 and 2011, the global farm income gain from GM crops has been US$98.2 billion. Farmers are astute business people, if GM crops didn't put more money in their pockets, they wouldn't buy GM seed the next season.

"Despite these gains, some states are still missing out. Over the past decade, Tasmania's agricultural sector has suffered a $71 million loss due to a moratorium on genetically modified organisms. South Australia will have lost around $115 million by 2019. This is in stark contrast to mainland states that have generated over AUD $595 million in farm gate benefits from GM crops since 1996, without compromising their ability to successfully market conventional or organic produce.

"In Australia, growing GM cotton varieties has seen environmental benefits resulting from decreased insecticide use and changes in the types of insecticides and herbicides used. Almost 100 per cent of Australia's cotton crop is now grown with GM varieties. Cultivation of GM insect resistant cotton varieties has enabled a reduction in the amount of insecticide active ingredient used by up to 85 per cent. This, in conjunction with industry stewardship practices, has greatly reduced the potential for chemical runoff into rivers in cotton growing regions of Australia

"The types of chemical being used have also changed. Because of the 'in-built' insecticide in GM insect resistant cotton, insect control can be more targeted and specific, meaning there is less of an impact on non-target organisms, allowing beneficial (ie. predatory insects) to remain in the crop.

"GM crops currently under research and development in Australia will help Australian farmers to combat environmental stresses such as drought, acid soils and salinity, which are being caused by climatic changes and previous non-sustainable farming practices. There is also considerable Australia research into GM traits that will bring health benefits to consumers, such as healthier starches, and cooking oils modified to be lower in saturated fats and with improved cooking qualities."

"GM crops are continuing to deliver significant productivity gains and environmental benefits. If they weren't, farmers wouldn't be using them and we wouldn't be seeing industries like the Australian cotton industry having the success it enjoys today," concluded Mr Cossey.

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About CropLife Australia

CropLife Australia (CropLife) is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife represents the innovators, developers, manufacturers and formulators of crop protection and agricultural biotechnology products. The plant science industry provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies that are key to the nation's agricultural productivity, sustainability and food security. The plant science industry is worth more than $1.5 billion a year to the Australian economy and directly employs thousands of people across the country.

CropLife and its members are committed to the stewardship of their products throughout their lifecycle and to ensuring that human health, environment and trade issues associated with agricultural chemical use in Australia are responsibly and sustainably managed. Our member companies spend more than $13 million a year on stewardship activities to ensure the safe and effective use of their products. CropLife ensures the responsible use of these products through its mandatory industry code of conduct and has set a benchmark for industry stewardship through programs such as ***drum****MUSTER,* ChemClear® and Agsafe Accreditation and Training. Our stewardship activities demonstrate our commitment to managing the impacts associated with container waste and unwanted chemicals.

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