

In recognition of Earth Day 2014, Howard Minigh, President and CEO of CropLife International, has issued the following statement:

The world is facing an unprecedented challenge: The demand for food is rising rapidly, but we only have a finite amount of land on which to grow it. On Earth Day we are reminded that currently seven billion people live on this planet but by 2050 that figure will have risen to around nine billion. To feed the world in 2050 we will need to increase food production by at least 70 per cent while protecting the earth's biodiversity and natural resources.

The role of plant science in tackling this challenge is vital. Advances in agricultural technologies already help farmers to make the most of existing cropland to increase production. Since 1961 yields of rice have more than doubled with the help of crop protection products and improved biotech seeds have helped farmers grow more soybean, canola and maize than ever before. In the future, biotech crops that can withstand drought could increase yields nearly 20 per cent in climate vulnerable areas like East Africa.

Plant science also helps protect our soil and water, ensuring yield gains are made sustainably. Planting herbicide tolerant biotech crops helps millions of farmers around the world to use zero and minimum tillage practices which lead to more efficient use of water and soil. For example, in Canada, more than 80 per cent of farmers using herbicide-tolerant canola have reduced soil erosion and increased soil moisture. But still more must be done. In the next 20 years it is predicted that nearly half of the world will be living under extreme water stress and given agriculture accounts for 70 per cent of global water use, the need for improved water efficiency is essential. In the United States, where farmers have embraced the use of plant science technologies, maize farmers are using 50,000 gallons less per acre than just 20 years ago. Taking their techniques to regions facing desertification and land degradation could make significant strides in protecting water resources in the coming decades.

Policy makers around the world have a key role to play – they must ensure regulations encourage innovation and reflect the importance of crop protection products and biotech crops towards achieving more efficient farming that protects our planet.

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Note to Editor:

CropLife International is the voice of the global plant science industry. It champions the role of agricultural innovations in crop protection and plant biotechnology in supporting and advancing sustainable agriculture; helping farmers feed a growing population while looking after the planet; and progressing rural communities. The world needs farmers, and farmers need plant science. CropLife International is proud to be at the heart of helping farmers grow.