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CropLife Foundation to Demonstrate Value of Crop Protection Technology in Improving African Agriculture at World Food Prize Event

WASHINGTON, D.C. — CropLife Foundation (CLF), a research and education non-profit organization focused on crop pest management issues in partnership with CNFA, a Washington-based enterprise development organization non-profit, will demonstrate the contributions modern crop science technology can make toward improving agricultural efficiency and resulting living conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa as presenters at The World Food Prize in Des Moines, Iowa.

In announcing the project, Jay Vroom, CLF chairman cited the pioneering work of Dr. Norman Borlaug, World Food Prize Founder and honorary director of the CropLife Foundation.

“As father of the Green Revolution, Dr. Borlaug’s philosophy and practice of using plant science technology to dramatically improve crop yields in developing countries truly provides the basis for this demonstration,” said Vroom.

Severe weed problems can reduce farmers’ yields in Africa from 25 to 100 percent; insects pose additional problems. CLF is investigating the use of herbicides to control weeds and other pesticides to combat insects and post-harvest losses on key crops such as maize and beans. By minimizing or eliminating the need for hand weeding through the targeted application of herbicides, labor time and associated costs are both reduced and farmers are able to plant and harvest additional crops. In addition, freed from the back breaking work of hand weeding, women have the potential to pursue other opportunities, like continuing education, to benefit themselves and their communities.

“The current practice in African agriculture is for women to use hand tools to chop weeds from crops,” said CLF Project Director Leonard Gianessi. “This practice creates severe back problems for the workers and is also very inefficient in preventing yield losses. Especially, the intensive, ongoing labor results in fewer women having time to capitalize on education and other opportunities.”

World Food Prize Founder, Dr. Borlaug, emphasized the hardship of hand weeding on both the farmer and his land in commenting on CLF’s Africa weed project. “I have often found that weed control is one of the most limiting factors affecting crop production in Africa and most developing countries. Many times you will hear a farmer say that he cannot grow any more corn, wheat or sorghum because he has to spend so much time controlling weeds over his acreage. This severely limits how such farmers view increased crop and food production,” noted Dr. Borlaug. “The drudgery of controlling weeds is truly one of the most important limitations to increasing crop production; I very well remember such drudgery growing up on our Iowa farm.”

In developing the demonstration, CNFA is utilizing its growing network of 1500 agrodealers in Africa. Fifty field plots are being planted in Kenya and Malawi and data will be collected to show the potential of crop protection products to reduce weeding, develop higher crop yields and generate higher income. Financial and technical support for the project is being provided by Syngenta Crop Protection, Dow AgroSciences, Bayer CropScience, DuPont Crop Protection, and Monsanto. The companies are also providing product samples for use in the demonstration plots.

"If the Kenya-Malawi demonstrations are as successful as we believe they will be, we will be seeking support from major funding organizations to expand the crop technology concept to all the 1500-plus agrodealers in our African network," said CNFA President John Costello. "These dealers," he added, "provide planting advice and crop inputs to millions of African farmers."

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About CropLife Foundation

CropLife Foundation was created in 2001 to promote and advance sustainable agriculture and the environmentally sound use of crop protection products and bioengineered agriculture. Through sound science-based research and education the organization helps global agriculture economically produce safe, high quality, abundant food, fiber, and other crops, thus ensuring food security and alleviating poverty, suffering, and hardship.

About CNFA

CNFA is dedicated to increasing and sustaining rural incomes in less developed areas of the world by empowering farmers and rural entrepreneurs. CNFA focuses on commercial activity, locally defined needs, and leveraged investment in order to foster the economic empowerment of rural residents and enterprises all along the food value chain—from farmers to local suppliers and processors, to larger companies, financial institutions, and distributors and exporters.