



For Immediate Release

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Weed Science Society of America Issue Spotlight:
Weeds Constrain the Quality of Life of African Women

WASHINGTON (July 29, 2008) — Solving weed problems is key to increasing crop yields and improving the lives of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Weed Science Society of America member Leonard Gianessi of the CropLife Foundation. He presented results from his study on the topic in a presentation to the 5th International Weed Science Congress on June 24, in Vancouver, Canada. The International Weed Science Congress is a cooperative effort of the International Weed Science Society, the Canadian Weed Science Society and the Weed Science Society of America.

The results of Gianessi's study of current weed control practices on smallholder farms in Africa concludes that "100 million women spend 20 billion hours a year in the backbreaking drudgery of pulling weeds by hand." Despite this mammoth effort, uncontrolled weeds still reduce crop yields in individual fields by 20 to 100 percent.

"In Africa, labor for pulling weeds is scarce and getting more expensive," says Gianessi. "Men are moving to the cities and AIDS is taking a terrible toll on the rural population. Approximately 90 percent of the weeding is done by women."

"Research shows most smallholder fields in Africa are not weeded at the optimal time to prevent significant yield losses," says Gianessi. "There is compelling data that show up to 50 percent of the typical farm's fields are never planted or are abandoned after planting because of weed overgrowth. And further survey results show African farmers are reluctant to apply fertilizers because weeds would be further stimulated and even more hand weeding would be needed."

Gianessi believes the current situation is not sustainable, and urges greater support by aid and development agencies of weed science research and farmer training programs in Africa. "African women are hand weeding a crop area equal to the entire crop area in the United States," he says.

The Weed Science Society of America encourages a whole-system, integrated approach to weed management, which considers all options when determining the best combination of farming practices and mechanical, chemical, genetic and biological tools. Successful weed management begins with education and weed prevention and ends with a careful consideration of economic, social and environmental needs.

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About the Weed Science Society of America

The Weed Science Society of America, a non-profit professional society, was founded in 1956 to encourage and promote the development of knowledge concerning weeds and their impact on the environment. The Weed Science Society of America, promotes research, education and extension outreach activities related to weeds; provides science-based information to the public and policy makers; and fosters awareness of weeds and their impacts on managed and natural ecosystems. For more information, visit www.wssa.net.

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