Industry Keynote Speaker – Challenges in the Crop Value Chain

Speaker: Ms. Janice Tranberg, Vice President, Western Canada, CropLife Canada

Janice Tranberg, western vice president of CropLife Canada – the trade association representing developers, manufacturers and distributors of plant science technologies – presented on the industry's challenges in the crop production sector. In the crop value chain, there are a number of issues which are important to maintaining and attracting investment in agricultural research and commercialization.

This highly scientific industry contributes significantly to international research and development. Each new biotech product takes ten to thirteen years and costs between one hundred and one-hundred-and-fifty million dollars to bring to market. With annual global expenditures of over five billion dollars, the industry accounts for one-third of the world's total agricultural research and development investment representing about 11 per cent of total sales. In order to maintain this commitment, the industry needs to know the path to commercialization is clear with a solid, science-based regulatory system.

Plant biotechnology innovations are gaining momentum and the number of submissions will be escalating. Whereas in the past 10 years there have been about 33 biotech approvals sought world-wide, it is anticipated there could be a three to five fold increase in the number of approvals sought in the next five years. Canada must prepare for an explosion of activity on this front.

Improved efficiency and performance of the regulatory system both within and between regulating departments and agencies is essential. More effective connections between different regulatory departments and agencies, who are evaluating the same products for different safety aspects, are needed to eliminate duplication and overlap, and to ensure a more holistic approach to safety evaluation. Clearer regulatory triggers focused on new unfamiliar products, while easing regulatory attention on more familiar products that have a history of safe use, will also increase efficiency.

Secondly, Canada needs to take a leadership role on global modernization of regulations. In a recent report by Clive James, 2012 marked an unprecedented 100-fold increase in the growth of biotech crop to 170 million hectares. Following this trend, more countries are also working to develop their own technologies. This means there will be an increasing need for appropriate training and human resource allocation to regulating agencies, and the country's continued alignment with like-minded nations.

Canada can, in part, help decrease the pressure it comes under by working towards increasing synchronization of approvals; recognizing regulatory decisions of other countries; continuing to lead on the development of policies to deal with low level presence; pursue regulatory bilateral and multilateral agreements to increase predictability and efficiency; and work towards common MRLs to allow small-market access to the latest pesticides.

Other challenges facing the industry include increasing public awareness and acceptance, encouraging our regulatory agencies to defend Canada's robust regulatory system, and building public - private partnerships to leverage all available sources of funding and capitalize on research in an ever competitive global agricultural sector.