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Agricultural sustainability and food security undermined by low productivity growth: report

Declining productivity growth in low-income countries puts UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets for nutrition, poverty and climate change at risk

DES MOINES, Iowa – For the fourth straight year, global agricultural productivity growth is not accelerating fast enough to sustainably feed the world in 2050, says a report by the Global Harvest Initiative (GHI) released today.

GHI's 8th annual Global Agricultural Productivity Report[®] (2017 GAP Report[®]): *A World of Productive Sustainable Agriculture* warns that unless this trend is reversed, the world may not be able to sustainably provide the food, feed, fiber and biofuels needed for a growing, more affluent global population.

Productivity in agriculture is not just about producing more or achieving higher yields; it makes best use of natural resources, lowers costs for farmers, reduces loss and waste in the value chain and supplies food and agriculture products for consumers at lower prices.

According to the GAP Report[®], global agricultural productivity must increase by 1.75 percent annually to meet the demands of nearly 10 billion people in 2050. GHI's annual assessment of global productivity growth – the GAP Index[™] – shows the current rate of growth is only 1.66 percent.

The rate of agricultural productivity growth for low-income countries is only 1.24 percent annually – a decline from 1.5 percent in 2015 and 1.31 percent in 2016.

This is well below the productivity growth rate needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG 2) target of doubling productivity for small-scale farmers in low-income countries and achieving Zero Hunger by 2050.

Hunger and malnutrition are rising again, after a decade of steady decline, according to the latest figures from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.

The long-term prospects for food security will be undermined further by low agricultural productivity growth, particularly in Africa and South Asia, according to GHI's analysis in the 2017 GAP Report[®].

At current rates of productivity growth, by 2030, sub-Saharan Africa will meet only 8 percent of its food demand through productivity growth – the efficient use of agricultural resources including land, labor, fertilizer, feed, machinery and livestock; South Asia will meet only 25 percent of its food demand through productivity growth.

“We must prioritize public and private agricultural research and development (R&D) and improvements to regulatory systems to stimulate innovations that improve productivity, with a particular emphasis on the needs of small-scale farmers,” said Doyle Karr, Biotechnology Public Policy director, DuPont, and chair of the GHI Board of Directors.

Practices and innovations for productive agriculture contribute to many of the SDG targets relating to economic growth, climate action and responsible natural resource management, affordable energy, education, gender equity and clean water.

“If agricultural productivity growth continues to decline, there will be significant ramifications for the economic vitality and environmental sustainability of food and agriculture systems. Farmers in low-income, food-deficit countries will use more land and water to increase their output, straining a natural resource base already threatened by extreme weather events and climate change,” said Margaret Zeigler, executive director of GHI.

The 2017 GAP Report highlights innovations and practices farmers of all scales are using to conserve soil and water, diversify to reduce risks and build stable livelihoods. With mechanization and precision agriculture, advancements in seed, fertilizer, biotechnologies and animal welfare practices, farmers can manage costs while producing more and protecting their soils, water quality, and animal health.

GHI presented the 2017 GAP Report® findings before an audience of farmers and youth involved in agriculture, and global leaders in science, research, policy and private industry attending the World Food Prize in Des Moines, Iowa.

Dr. Margaret Zeigler, executive director of GHI, was joined by panelists Doyle Karr, Biotechnology Public Policy director, DuPont and GHI Board chair; Stewart Leeth, vice president of Regulatory Affairs and chief sustainability officer, Smithfield Foods; Juan José Molina Echeverry, veterinarian and rancher, El Hatice Nature Reserve, Colombia; Sally Rockey, executive director, Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research; and Wendy Wintersteen, endowed dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Iowa State University.

Resources

- The 2017 GAP Report is **presented at the World Food Prize Symposium** in Des Moines, Iowa and the event is **streamed live online October 18 from 11:00 AM to noon CDT** at www.globalharvestinitiative.org
- **The GAP Report®** can be found on www.globalharvestinitiative.org.
- **Follow the event on Twitter:** #GAPReport and @Harvest2050

About The Global Harvest Initiative

The Global Harvest Initiative (GHI) is a collaborative private-sector voice for productivity growth throughout the agricultural value chain to sustainably meet the demands of a growing world. Since 2009, GHI has been focused on the importance of agricultural productivity for global food security, and releases its signature GAP Report®, an annual benchmark of the global rate of agricultural productivity. GHI's growing membership includes DuPont, Elanco Animal Health, Farmland Partners Inc., John Deere, Monsanto Company, The Mosaic Company and Smithfield Foods. GHI is joined by Consultative Partner Organizations from the conservation, university and multilateral development bank sectors. Visit us at <http://www.globalharvestinitiative.org>, Twitter @Harvest2050 <http://twitter.com/#!/harvest2050>, and Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/GlobalHarvestInitiative>.

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