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

U.S. farmers focus on staying competitive; concerned about trade and consumer engagement

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.

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.

Productivity in agriculture is not just about producing more or achieving higher yields; it makes best use of natural resources, lowers costs for farmers, helping them succeed in today's competitive business cycle, and supplies food and agriculture products for consumers at lower prices.

If agricultural productivity growth continues to stagnate, there will be significant ramifications for the economic vitality and environmental sustainability of food and agriculture systems. The availability of affordable, safe and nutritious food also will be undermined.

Farmers are a key force behind the growth in agricultural productivity over the last 30 years, but they face considerable challenges today. These include volatile agricultural markets and shifting consumer demand, extreme weather events that devastate their crops and livestock and conflict that uproots their farms and communities.

U.S. farmers are particularly concerned about how to stay globally competitive in an era of low crop prices and higher prices for seeds, fertilizer, crop protection, machinery and storage.

"We must prioritize public and private agricultural research and development (R&D) and improvements to regulatory systems to stimulate innovations that improve productivity and reduce costs for farmers," said Doyle Karr, Biotechnology Public Policy director, DuPont, and chair of the GHI Board of Directors.

Uncertainty about trade opportunities and regulations complicates planning for U.S. farmers and industry. They also are aware of consumer questions about their products and production practices and share their concerns about the safety and sustainability of food and agriculture.

"The global agriculture sector must renew our commitment to engage in dialogue with consumers through active conversation and collaboration. Farmers and consumers share the same goals, but often there is an information gap between them," said Karr.

The 2017 GAP Report highlights innovations and practices farmers are using to conserve soil and water, diversify to reduce risks and build stable businesses they can leave for their children. With 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.

"In addition to revitalizing U.S. investments in research, farmers will require additional public good investments such as rural infrastructures for high-quality, high-speed fixed broadband and mobile cellular coverage, railways, roads, inland waterways and marine ports. Such investments, when coupled with new and expanded regional and global trade agreements, bring food and agriculture products to global consumers and keep costs low," said Margaret Zeigler, executive director of GHI. "Public-sector investments can be leveraged by private-sector partnerships for research, infrastructure, risk management products and for nutrition programs."

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.

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 Hatico 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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