

Science Into Action.

This week, as the world population reaches a staggering 7 billion people, leading scientists from 38 countries gathered to identify science based solutions and research priorities to enhance agriculture and food security in a changing climate.

A global science conference on climate-smart agriculture hosted by Wageningen UR (University & Research centre) in the Netherlands, October 24-26, was designed to set scientific research priorities that will lead to broader use of climate-smart agriculture practices and inform the upcoming global climate change negotiations in Durban, South Africa.

Climate-smart agriculture will strengthen food security, adaptation and mitigation where farmers use proven techniques such as mulching and inter cropping together and have access to innovative practices such as breeding drought and flood tolerant crops, improved early warning systems and risk insurance.

Speaking at the conference, South African Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Tina Joemat-Pettersson urged scientists to send clear advice to policy makers about the impact of climate change and what steps need to be taken to ensure food security. She quoted former President Nelson Mandela calling for “a world in which decisions are made on the basis of facts and knowledge, not myths and superstition.”

The world today faces one of the biggest challenges of the 21st century: how to feed 9 billion people in 2050 in a way that is less detrimental to planet Earth, under a changing climate and in the context of growing competition for land and natural resources.

Hans Hoogeveen, Director General of the Netherlands Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation and co-host of the conference urged scientists to work more closely with farmers. “Every day we must ask how can we get the latest knowledge to farmers, especially women farmers. Research, training and extension services are crucial in this.”

Scientists committed to focus their research on sustainable intensification, climate risk management and mitigation, national policies, breeding (crop, fish and animal) for a 2030 world and linking climate science to agricultural science. They called for further funding to support research into action.

Arguing that monitoring must be a priority, Peter Holmgren, Director, Climate, Energy and Tenure Division, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, stressed that “we must measure the performance of climate-smart agriculture in cost-effective ways using a small number of parameters related to income, resilience and mitigation. We need new efforts in science to prove these methods and to provide tools to policy-makers and finance institutions.

Delegates discussed existing programs that are reason for optimism in countries struggling with food security in a changing climate. For example, in agro forestry programs in Niger, farmers planted trees together with food crops across five million hectares and doubled their crop yields in some areas, also increasing their resilience to increasingly erratic weather.

According to Juergen Voegelé, World Bank Director of Agriculture and Rural Development, “The focus of the World Bank Group is on delivering immediate benefits to small holder farmers who can increase productivity through techniques such as agro-forestry, intercropping and better water harvesting, together with breeding drought- and flood-resistant crops.. We need to explore the potential benefits to farmers from increasing the stock of carbon in the soil. This is why we need the advice of scientists.”

Rudy Rabbinge, Professor of Sustainable Development and Food Security, Wageningen University, closed the conference by noting that “The scientists recognized the need for transformational change to achieve science for impact in agriculture and environmental sciences. There is a need for a change of focus, new objectives and a wholesale change to the way we work with the various actors: farmers, intermediate organizations and private sector companies.”

Over 160 global science leaders from scientific institutions, universities, multilateral scientific organizations, governments, international organizations, farmers’ organizations, private sector and civil society organizations attended the conference and agreed the attached statement.

The conference was organized by Wageningen UR (University & Research centre), the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation and the World Bank and sponsored by CDKN, CGIAR, CIRAD, CTA and FAO.

More information:

Conference website: www.gscsa2011.org

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