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A Call to Agricultural Action



This article is by Hugh Grant, the chairman, president, and chief executive officer of Monsanto.

In the wake of the United Nations' report that there are now 7 billion people living on earth, policy-makers, academics, and the press have taken a close look at how the world will feed a rapidly growing population that is expected to reach nearly 9.5 billion by 2050. The challenge is clear. With nearly 1 billion people already suffering from hunger and malnutrition in some of the fastest growing areas of the world, the challenge of doubling food production by 2050 will become more difficult as key resources become increasingly scarce and a changing climate creates unforeseen obstacles.

Undoubtedly, the world is going to have to produce more. But it cannot do so at the expense of the land or environment. We must produce more with less.

Despite the enormity of this task, through international cooperation between all sectors—public, private, and industry—we can meet this challenge. Success, however, will require an intense global focus on helping farmers, regardless of their size, become more productive, reduce their impact on the environment, and achieve a higher standard of living.

In the face of these needs, choice is more important than ever. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Innovation in agriculture can play an essential role across the value chain, but the availability of new agricultural technology will not be enough. Rather, there must be broad collaboration addressing the many issues affecting farmers' ability to reach their maximum productivity. Farmers in all parts of the world must be able to produce a viable crop, bring it to market, earn a profit, and reinvest in their business the next year. Helping farmers feed people is at the heart of what we do at Monsanto—their challenges are our challenges—and we are focused on creating innovative solutions.

At the World Economic Forum earlier this year, we had the privilege of being part of a group that put forward a new vision for agriculture, along with 17 other companies and representatives of the public sector, that calls for increasing farm production by 20%, decreasing greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, and reducing rural poverty by 20%—*every single decade*. Known as the 20/20/20 road map, this ambitious plan is a both humanitarian and economic effort that will create opportunities for countries all around the world. Monsanto has already committed to pursuing specific, regional public private partnerships, the first of which are already underway in Tanzania and Vietnam.

Why is international collaboration important? Because agriculture provides not only food but also essential commodities, services, and social goods that

facilitate economic growth, and if we are asking our farmers to do more, we should do more to help them.

For example, here at Monsanto we have already begun participating in programs to focus on educating new ranks of plant breeders in rice and wheat, two crops that have seen less investment in research in developing countries. We've also partnered with various organizations to help provide farmers with training and inputs that can make a difference in their yields. One such program in India has improved the socioeconomic conditions of 10,000 farmers simply by providing access to seeds, fertilizers, crop management inputs, and training.

Similarly, in just the last 10 years, better seeds and new seed technologies have resulted in tremendous strides toward reducing the amount of land, water, and energy required to produce key staple crops, especially in the U.S. Widespread adoption of these technologies around the world could have a substantial benefit for farmers; comparing the average yields in the U.S. with those in emerging markets such as Brazil, China, Mexico, Argentina, India, and Africa shows that there is clearly an extraordinary opportunity to increase productivity on the same amount of land. We have just scratched the surface in water use efficiency, and remarkable improvements are being made every year in the areas of pesticide reduction and nutrition value.

Let's face it: Having 7 billion people on earth demands a call to action. There needs to be a broad based collaboration addressing the many issues that affect a farmer's ability to reach maximum productivity. Technology providers, agronomics experts, and community organizations need to come together to develop innovative solutions that meet humanity's needs on a local and global scale.

Improvements take time. And the world is not waiting patiently. It's growing, it's hungry, it's thirsty. Our company is proud to participate in this dialogue, and we pledge to offer our best and brightest minds to help solve what may be our greatest challenge yet.

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