International Partnership Aims to Boost Wheat Yields by 50 Percent

Ciudad Obregón, MEXICO (Newswise) — A new international partnership seeks to increase wheat yields by 50 percent by 2034. This will address demand for wheat — one of the world's most important crops — that is growing much faster than production.

The new International Wheat Yield Partnership (IWYP) brings together research funders, international aid agencies, foundations, companies and major wheat research organizations. It was launched at the Borlaug Summit on Wheat for Food Security in Ciudad Obregón, Mexico. The Summit marked the 100th birthday of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug, credited with sparking the agricultural 'Green Revolution' of the 1960s and helping to save over one billion people from starvation.

Steve Visscher, Chair of the IWYP board of founding partners and BBSRC Deputy Chief Executive, said, "We need a collective global approach to make more wheat available. It is the most widely grown staple food crop and new varieties with increased yield will be vital to feed the world's growing population."

The world's population is estimated to reach 9.6 billion by 2050 and wheat production will have a crucial role in food security and the global economy. The World Bank estimates that global wheat production must increase by 60 percent between 2000 and 2050 to meet rising demand. However wheat yield increases in developed nations have slowed since 1990. Politically destabilizing wheat price spikes seen in 2007-08 and 2011 are likely to be repeated if wheat production falls short of demand.

The IWYP research program provides a unique vehicle for new discoveries and their rapid incorporation into wheat crops grown throughout the world. IWYP will stimulate new research, amplify the output from existing programs and make scientific discoveries available to farmers in developing and developed nations.

"By working together, IWYP members will enable scientific breakthroughs that are out of reach via existing mechanisms," added Visscher. "One focus of IWYP will be to improve wheat's use of the sun's energy. Other important crops, like maize, are much more efficient at turning sunlight's energy into food."

The partnership's initiators include by the UK's Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food of Mexico (SAGARPA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), as the lead implementer of the United States Feed the Future initiative. They will work together with a growing

number of private and public funders from across the world.

According to Hans Braun, Director of CIMMYT's Global Wheat Program, "Wheat is a key source of calories and protein for 4.5 billion people in more than 100 countries. Research focused on yield improvements is critical for them."

Wherever breakthroughs are found they will be bred as rapidly as possible into elite, commercially viable seed by CIMMYT or other public sector breeding programs and also by the private sector. "The potential of these breakthroughs will then be evaluated in relevant environments across the world and continually developed until those capable of achieving the desired yield gains can be released as finished varieties," Braun explained.

Added Braun, "Increased collaboration, more advanced research and better systems to effectively reach wheat producers are needed to address the looming global food security challenges. IWYP fulfills those mandates and is designed to focus solely on increasing the yield of this critically important crop."

Tjada McKenna, Acting Assistant to the Administrator for USAID Bureau for Food Security, said, "Working together, through dynamic partnerships like this one, is what makes poverty and hunger solvable. The U.S. Government is pleased to support this research aimed at increasing wheat production and resilience."

IWYP founding partners regard the private sector as an important partner in developing and delivering the Partnership's ambitious goals and will engage with companies within the private sector to advance IWYP's aims and will provide benefits for the companies that engage. It will drive to secure up to $100 million over the next five years from funders and donors worldwide. Significant commitments have already been pledged from Europe, the Americas and Australia.

Professor M.S. Swaminathan, Chair of the MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, said, "The formation of the International Wheat Yield Partnership on the occasion of the birth centenary of Norman Borlaug is a meaningful method of celebrating his life and work and at the same time ensuring that his life's mission of a hunger-free world becomes a reality. I wish the International Wheat Yield Partnership great success in expanding, sustaining and spreading the yield revolution in wheat initiated by Norman Borlaug."

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