

The Role of Plant Breeding in Food, Fiber, Fuel Challenges

Media Advisory for June 16-18, 2008

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DES MOINES, IA -- The world faces significant challenges to sustainably produce safe, nutritious, and affordable food, fiber, and plant-derived fuel. While these challenges seem daunting, they can be addressed in part with sustained domestic and international investments in plant breeding.

The National Plant Breeding Coordinating Committee (PBCC) is holding its Second National Plant Breeding Workshop on June 16-18, 2008 in Des Moines, Iowa, USA. The PBCC and Monsanto, a major sponsor of the workshop, invite the public and the media to attend this event, held at the Embassy Suites in Des Moines, IA on the river (Registration: \$250, waived for credentialed media). Participants at the workshop will discuss the role of plant breeding -- a process of improving plant productivity, quality, taste, appearance, affordability, and tolerance to environmental pressures -- in designing crops and systems appropriate to meet these challenges head-on.

The 2008 workshop will focus on building partnerships between society and the global community of plant breeders. The workshop will include a tour of Monsanto's facilities at Huxley, Iowa, discussion sessions, and presentations by invited speakers: Chuck Hasslebrook, Molly Jahn, Jeff Pedersen, Charlie Stuber, and Greg Tolla.

"Plant breeding plays an integral role in our lives. Forty years ago, plant breeding led to varieties that contributed to the Green Revolution, which provided food security to hundreds of millions of people," says PBCC Chair Stephen Baenziger, University of Nebraska. "Plant breeding advances have led to numerous innovations, generally unknown to the public, that have improved crop production efficiency and profitability, reduced the environmental impact of agriculture and forestry, and improved the nutritional value of our food supply. However, investments in plant breeding are on the decline."

According to Baenziger, research performed by trained plant breeders identifies favorable traits, puts them into new varieties, and proves they will be valuable at a small scale or commercial scale. Today, the agricultural, horticultural, and forestry sectors and related institutions face a substantial challenge to sustain the programs necessary to create new plant varieties. Such varieties have the potential to combat malnutrition, climate change, drought, and desertification, while enhancing health, increasing our food and fiber supply, and supporting our biofuels industry, and educating new plant breeders.

Ted Crosbie, head of plant breeding at Monsanto, agrees, "We, in the plant breeding industry, face a number of challenges. More plant breeders are reaching retirement age at a time when the

need for plant breeders has never been greater. We hope that this meeting will help to bring forward answers we need to renew our nation's capacity for plant breeding. Monsanto is honored to host this important event at a critical time for our industry.”

The National Plant Breeding Coordinating Committee serves as a forum regarding issues and opportunities of national and global importance to the public and private sectors of the U.S. national plant breeding effort. For more information, contact PBCC Secretary Todd Wehner, todd_wehner@ncsu.edu or 919-515-5363.