

Brussels, Belgium — 30 March 2020

CropLife Africa Middle East calls for functioning Agro Input Markets despite lockdown measures related to the COVID-19 Crisis

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic will have an impact including the pesticide industry in the Africa and Middle East region. Various countries are faced with partial to total lockdown which is having an effect on the ease of doing business and on agricultural production as a whole. Although it is too early to measure the actual impact, discussions with the national associations in the region indicate growing disruptions in the agricultural sector which employs an average of 60% of the population. The challenges faced by Africa Middle East countries will impact global supplies in the future and is therefore something of global interest.

Together with health workers who are at the forefront of this crisis, farmers and the agricultural sector have a key role to play in this COVID-19 crisis management by assuring continued food supply especially for the local population. With often above 50% food imports and at times stock levels of a few weeks only, local production and its national distribution may become more important in the coming months. Regardless of the measures to enforce quarantine and social distancing, people will need reliable and regular food supply just like they will require medical supplies.

Pesticide imports and interstate movement of pesticides are critical factors for crop protection products to reach distributors and eventually farmers. The free flow of inputs is essential in countries such as Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya and Ethiopia, countries which are soon going into peak planting and growing season.

The East Africa region has also seen an upsurge of locusts especially in Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia. Disrupted distribution of the required products will be a major setback in locust control. Similarly, Fall Armyworm (FAW) control continues to be a challenge in the Southern Africa countries. Similar concerns exist in countries in West Central Africa where the planting season is approaching for cotton and staple foods. In addition, the main export crop cocoa will require the annual plant protection products to control pests and diseases in the coming months.

Farmers and Farm workers are in the frontline of providing the world with a stable food supply. Now they will be instrumental in keeping a health crisis from turning into a hunger crisis. While non-essential travel restrictions have been an important way to prevent the continued spread of COVID-19, we must ensure the uninterrupted and timely supply of crop protection products, seeds and fertilizers so farmers can continue to maximize yields and ensure high quality harvests. Any delay within the agricultural input supply chain could put food supplies within the region at risk.

Realising that this is a challenge for all to overcome, CropLife Africa Middle East member companies are working hard to continue providing the farming communities with the needed tools and inputs to maintain a stable food supply and will look to governments to continue to treat food production as an essential service in the response to COVID-19 and to ensure that food insecurity does not further increase this challenge.

As the regional association representing the plant science industry, we are committed to supporting the national association network with information and expertise on how different countries succeed to maintain a functioning agro-input market and sustainable agricultural production also under the challenging COVID-19 situation.

We appeal to governments in the region to consider agricultural inputs as essential goods so as to ensure farmer access to these inputs, under strict observation of health guidelines (social distancing) to ensure safety for all. Food security in the coming months can only be secured if farmers can access these inputs on time and in the right quantities.

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