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THE FOOD CRISIS HAS NOT GONE AWAY

May 29, 2009 — Shanghai, China — Scientists of the International Plant Nutrition Institute (IPNI) reported to the organization's Board of Directors on their continued efforts in addressing world food security at a recent meeting in Shanghai, China. With agronomic programs in North and South America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, China, India, Southeast Asia, and soon Oceania, IPNI scientists are focused on producing more food through more efficient use of fertilizers.

Global food security continues to be a major concern of IPNI and the fertilizer industry. "The food crisis will not go away," said Dr. Christian Witt, IPNI Regional Director for Southeast Asia. "While media attention has been diverted to the global financial crisis, the food crisis has not changed and will be back in the headlines sooner than we think." Dr. Witt told the Board of the Institute's success in Southeast Asia in increasing maize yields and nutrient management in rice production. Progress in soil testing to improve fertilizer use efficiency in China and improved wheat production through balanced fertilization in India were reported by other Institute scientists.

The IPNI Board meeting was held in conjunction with the 77th Annual Conference of the International Fertilizer Industry Association (IFA). IFA's forecast for nutrient consumption for the 2008/2009 fertilizer year estimates global nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium fertilizer use is down on average by about 2, 7, and 14%, respectively, from the previous year.

"We are especially concerned with the recent trend in farmers cutting back on fertilizer use," said IPNI President, Dr. Terry Roberts. "Fertilizer is responsible for more than half of the world's food production and with the need to double or triple food production by 2030, cutting back on fertilizer will only worsen the food shortage problem." IPNI scientists addressed the question of the implications of reduced fertilizer use. Research shows that crop yields will decrease if fertilizer is eliminated or reduced. The question is ... how much yield loss can be expected? There is not a

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simple answer. It all depends on the soil test level, the soil type, the weather, tillage practices, crop, and past fertilization practices.

The impact from lower rates will be less if farmers have been maintaining good soil fertility. However, where soil fertility is lower and farmers have only been applying maintenance application levels and just replacing the nutrients removed by harvested crops, yield loss from reduced rates could be 10 to 15% or even higher. “We cannot afford to use less than optimal rates,” Dr. Roberts explained. “Fertilizer is still one of the best investments a farmer can make. Reducing rates below optimum means less profit for the grower and also results in mining of soil nutrients. Maintaining soil fertility is easier and less costly than building it up.” More information about the impact of reduced application rates on crop yields is available on the IPNI website at www.ipni.net.

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