

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

With time comes change, and this year we are welcoming you to the fourth issue of **BETTER CROPS-SOUTH ASIA**. The change this year is in our name. We have decided to call our programme in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal the “South Asia Programme” of IPNI. While India is the dominant agricultural economy in this region, we wanted to be inclusive in covering all the areas where we work in this part of the IPNI world.

Food security is without a doubt the number one agricultural issue in South Asia. And it is easy to find

a number of people who have waded into the debate on how much we really do need to increase food production globally, ranging from only 50% to a high of 100% increase by 2050. Well, does the number related to the change really matter? I think that all of us working in the agricultural

industry know that we have a major job ahead of us over the next 10 to 20 years to meet any of these targeted food production increases. Let us get focused on building partnerships between agencies so that we can bring together those technologies which, when combined, have the potential to address the urgent need of increasing the rate of food production each year.

Supporting the role of nutrients in the food security puzzle. I know that most of our cooperators are well aware of the role that nutrients play in achieving high yields and quality in our food crops. Nowhere in the world is this more evident than in South Asia. Over the past 20 years, IPNI has worked with Universities and Government Agencies in the region to show that the issue of nutrient deficiency is a multi-nutrient challenge, not just an N, P, or K issue. Secondary and micronutrients have become a major deficiency once these macronutrients are addressed, indicating the low levels of indigenous soil fertility common in the region. The ever so commonly cited “yield stagnation” plaguing South Asia is a classic example of how far we have to go in building our crop production efforts in the absence of adequate supplies of all nutrients.

Building a better equipped tool box is what is needed. The number of crop diagnostic and production technologies available today is really quite significant, as is the problem in picking which one to use. However, I think the real challenge is finding those tools which can be effectively, and economically, implemented on small farms in South Asia. Optical sensors may be seen as a powerful tool for improving nitrogen use efficiency, but what happened to the leaf color chart? At IPNI, we have made a commitment to evaluate the Nutrient Expert decision support tool for maize and wheat. Current field research indicates that there may be potential to develop and deliver fertiliser recommendations which are more site-specific for individual farmer fields, in the absence of soil testing. As with all tools, verification is critical, along with finding the partners who can use the technology to help in making recommendations that cater to individual farmer needs.

We continue in our efforts, and remain optimistic that we have the tools to build on higher yields to help achieve the food security goals in South Asia.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Adrian Johnston".

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