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News Release

Smallholder farmers from Africa call for improved access to technology to enable regenerative agriculture and foster resilience

- Second Roundtable of African Farmers in Rome gathers farmers from the Sub-Saharan region to discuss how a diverse set of practices and technologies can enhance productivity, soil health, biodiversity, water retention and adaptation to climate change
 - Policy changes, financial commitments and knowledge transfer can help scale regenerative practices and innovative technologies that are tailored to farmers' needs
 - To improve smallholders' livelihoods, agricultural policies need to be driven by outcomes, openness to technology, and evidence, farmers stated
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Rome/Italy, October 8, 2024 – Smallholder farmers in Africa benefit from regenerative agriculture through a diverse set of practices but need better access to technology. This is the key outcome of the second Roundtable of African Farmers, co-organized by the Pontifical Academy for Life, Bayer, Global Farmer Network, World Farmers' Organization, African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF), and Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA). Sub-Saharan Farmers from Ivory Coast, Lesotho, Mali, Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia discussed with international policy makers and other key stakeholders about the importance of policies that enable smallholders to apply regenerative agricultural practices more broadly and to improve food security in Africa.

They called for governments to develop policies that promote an outcome-driven, technology-neutral, and evidence-based approach to agricultural solutions. Bringing this together with enhanced farmer training and support for regenerative agricultural practices could be a big step towards more productivity while benefitting the environment. This can be achieved through a diverse set of practices and technologies that combine modern

and traditional tools – all of which tailored to the farmers' specific needs. Most importantly, the farmers state that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this endeavour.

“The vast majority of food in Africa is being produced by smallholder farmers. It's important to listen to them and to learn about the big challenges they face in light of climate change,” said Debra Mallowah, Head of Africa region for Bayer's Crop Science Division. “We have heard today how many farmers are contributing to the socio-economic and environmental development of the Sub-Saharan region. The private sector, together with governments and policy makers, international organizations, research institutions, and civil society are to develop infrastructures, build capacity, carry out research and invest in innovations to create an enabling environment for those farmers to thrive and ultimately benefit all of us.”

Elisha Lewanika, a Zambian farmer, stressed the importance of regenerative agriculture and the need for proper farming techniques to improve soil health and crop yields: “Crop rotation, particularly alternating between nitrogen-fixing crops and cereals, is a way to maintain soil fertility and ensure sustainable yields. Reducing tillage and other forms of soil disturbances preserve soil structure, minimize erosion and protect soil microbes.”

For Matente Kethisa from Lesotho, soil health and conservation are key to tackle climate change challenges: “In my community of Nikito, soil is the foundation of agricultural efforts. We focus on preserving and enhancing its quality through crop rotation, mulching, no-till farming, and nutrient management.”

Nigerian farmer Stella Thomas agreed and added: “While hybrid seeds and open-pollinated varieties are already available, GMO crops are the way forward for us in Nigeria, especially to address drought and pest infestations. With GMO crops, farmers can use fewer herbicides and insecticides, enhancing both productivity and sustainability.”

Amadou Sidibe from Mali highlighted the benefits of greenhouse technology in mitigating climate change effects: “While heavy rainfall and flooding were impacting many parts of West Africa, our greenhouses remained unaffected. During dry periods, my greenhouses use 90 percent of available water in a very efficient manner, making them a powerful tool for managing agriculture in times of an increasingly unpredictable climate.”

Despite the proven benefits of diverse approaches, the farmers highlighted the barriers that they face to access the tools they need to fully realize the potential of regenerative agriculture. Low public and private R&D investments, high upfront costs for modern technologies, limited access to insurance and credit policies and lack of infrastructure hinder many smallholder farmers to contribute to agriculture's transition towards higher productivity with a reduced impact on the environment.

To promote regenerative agriculture, the African farmers are urging governments to revise policies, allowing access to diverse technologies tailored to farmers' needs. Financial institutions should offer low-interest loans, grants, and insurance products especially for smallholders, encouraging investment in modern technologies and sustainable practices. According to the farmers, expanding education and training through demonstration farms, digital platforms, and extension services remains essential. Furthermore, increased public and private investment in R&D, alongside collaboration between companies, farmers, and research institutions, is vital to develop region-specific solutions and make both traditional and innovative practices accessible and affordable.

Agriculture supports over 50 percent of Africa's population and contributes 35 percent to its GDP, reaching up to 60 percent in some countries. Despite this, Africa faces rising food imports and persistent food insecurity due to low productivity, low value added per worker, and subsistence farming below efficient scales with an average farm size of 1.3 hectares. Despite having 65 percent of the remaining arable land of the world, only 10 percent is utilized.

For Bayer, regenerative agriculture is an outcome-based production model which has improving soil health at its core and strengthening resilience as a key objective. Other principal aims include mitigating climate change, maintaining or restoring biodiversity, conserving water as well as increasing yields and improving the economic and social well-being of farmers and their communities.

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