

The Next Green Revolution Needs Willpower

By Dal Grooms

It doesn't matter who you talk to, feeding the world in 2050 is going to be a big job. The World Summit on Food Security, which just concluded in Rome, clearly pointed out that the job must be accomplished through reliance on technology.

That technology, they say, must increase production by 70 percent. Is the world ready for the next Green Revolution?

The first Green Revolution took place in the mid-1960s, but it really had its start in 1945. Technology developed for wartime quickly found peacetime uses. Mechanical technology was adapted to increase efficiency. Scientists used chemical technology to improve both plant and animal health. Communication innovations improved our ability to give people useful news and information to adopt these changes.

This time we don't need 20 years to gear up technology. In principle, achieving the next Green Revolution should just be an outgrowth of the technology changes that began in 1945.

If only it were so simple.

One such technology—crops developed through biotechnology—offers the option of providing higher yields, while conserving resources such as water, energy and land. And after 15 years of use in many countries, biotechnology has been shown to reduce the need for pesticides.

In 2008, 13.3 million farmers in 25 countries planted biotech crops. That compares to fewer than 2 million farmers in the U.S. Clearly, farmers worldwide recognize the benefits of biotechnology.

However, there are areas of the world where knowledge and willpower to overcome pressure from activist groups isn't strong enough. Extreme activists have pressured politicians to ban biotech seeds. They've frightened consumers and farmers with unsubstantiated claims. This is the case in much of Africa.

If there is a place on earth that needs biotechnology, it is Africa. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that the use of biotech crops and fertilizer could increase productivity in areas of the continent by 150 percent to 700 percent.

But, Africa isn't the only place being held back by naysayers. Governments in much of Europe, many countries in Asia and parts of Australia have chosen to shackle farmers' productivity options because there is no willpower.

Fortunately, there is a groundswell of farmers and scientists who are beginning to stand up and say they need biotech crops to not only feed their families, but also the world. Just a few weeks ago, Britain's Royal Society noted that it will take "high-tech crops" to help solve the problem of hunger.

If the world is committed to fighting hunger, it must look for more than technology. It must look for willpower. Technology advancements for the next Green Revolution are under way. Will there be the willpower to match it?