March 25, 2020

His Excellency Dato Lim Jock Hoi
Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN Secretariat
70A Jalan Sisingamangaraja
Jakarta 12110, Indonesia

Dear Secretary General Lim:

Thank you for your leadership and dedicated service to ASEAN, the region’s food and agricultural sectors, and the men and women who work within them.

As you know, the coronavirus disease 2019 (CoVid-19) was recently declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a global pandemic and has been aggressively spreading across our region. On behalf of the Asia-Pacific Seed Association, CropLife Asia and the industries our organizations represent, we would like to applaud the efforts of those working tirelessly around the region to protect our population. We also stand ready to support the farming communities of Asia that are working to ensure a sustainable supply of safe and nutritious food during these challenging times.

Meanwhile, the WHO declaration has prompted many countries, territories, states and cities to impose emergency containment measures to stop or limit the spread of the underlying virus (SARS-Cov-2). Across Southeast Asia and the larger region, these have included quarantines as well as restrictions on travel.

While such measures may be necessary at this time, hindering or delaying the movement of vital necessities would have major implications for domestic, regional and global food and nutritional security. Thus, it is crucial that we ensure the uninterrupted and timely transboundary movement of crop protection products, seeds and foodstuffs so farmers can continue to maximize yields and ensure high quality harvests.

Crop protection products and seeds are fundamental components in the food supply value chain, driving seasonal cycles with sowing, harvesting and production. Should their availability to farmers be denied or delayed, it would gravely impact the livelihood of millions of farmers – and in turn, regional food security.

Given the high stakes, it is critically important that regional governments and relevant agencies (ie, departments and ministries managing agriculture, farmers and/or rural affairs as well as those directing commerce and international trade regulations) ensure that all corresponding services such as laboratory testing, regulatory review, and phytosanitary certification and clearance, continue to operate at full capacity.

Public-private sector cooperation is absolutely vital in ensuring that international movement of crop protection products and seeds as well as other agriculture inputs is not affected, nor subjected to
unnecessary roadblocks. In this spirit, we respectfully seek your support in requesting ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) be directly consulted with relevant COVID-19 national policy-making in an effort to guard against the dire unintended consequences to national and regional food security that closing factories, facilities and retail outlets enabling critical agricultural production would bring. It is our strong opinion that such enterprises adhering to WHO standards of care and hygiene should be allowed to continue operating during this time.

At the height of the CoVid-19 outbreak in China, the central and local governments issued a policy to ensure the stable supply of food products and agricultural production materials. The government also released a stimulus package to effectively support the stable production and supply of agricultural products. These actions provide a key learning for Southeast Asian nations as we near the spring planting season.

We have recently confirmed with the Department of Agriculture in Thailand that shipments of all agricultural inputs, including crop protection products and seeds, will not be impacted and that all imported seed trade services will continue to be offered as usual. Likewise, we have also been reassured by the Philippine Seed Industry Association that there are no anticipated impacts for seed movement.

Our organizations continue to urge our government stakeholders, retail outlets and larger food and agriculture sector partners to read and follow WHO advice. Following below are general and more specific references and guidelines to help ensure optimal food safety with regards to crop protection and seeds production, registration, movement and distribution.

**Crop Protection**

- Our organizations request governments to continue to facilitate the international and domestic movement of pesticides and seeds to ensure economic continuity and preserve the long-term operation of food supply chains. Agriculture industries must continue to supply and support farmers.

- Completion of regulatory studies, either in the field or laboratory, may be disrupted due to personnel availability and supplies of samples or study materials. This can lead to uncompleted studies or the need to repeat/postpone studies. In order to meet the expected regulatory requirements for crop protection registration or reregistration, the plant science industry requests national authorities to consider flexibility in regulatory timelines.

- Our organizations are committed to do their utmost to inform regulatory authorities of any foreseen delays in its planned submissions and studies and would like to propose joint mitigation measures that can minimize impacts, when necessary and justified by the registrant.
Seeds

- There is no evidence to date that coronaviruses can be transmitted through food and seeds. Cooked food is recommended as the virus can be killed by heat treatment of at least 30 minutes at 60 Celsius degrees.

- According to WHO, and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), coronaviruses have poor survivability on surfaces, and all confirmed transmissions to date have been human-to-human. Furthermore, there is no evidence that packages of imported goods are a source of transmission, and it is highly improbable that coronaviruses can survive international transport. This is especially true for shipments of seed handled by leading international seed companies that already employ strict sanitary, phytosanitary and hygienic handling protocol in accordance with international standards.

- Nonetheless, our organizations urge all those working in the field, or in operations to follow WHO standard recommendations, specifically those covering:
  - proper hand hygiene
  - cough/cold hygiene practices
  - use of appropriate PPE (mask and hand sanitizer)
  - safe food practices
  - avoiding close contact, when possible, with anyone showing symptoms of respiratory illness such as coughing and sneezing

On behalf of APSA and CropLife Asia, we would like to reiterate our gratitude to you for your leadership to the region. If our organizations along with the companies we represent can be helpful with additional information and more specific recommendations regarding the issues raised, we would greatly welcome the opportunity.

Best Regards,

Dr. Siang Hee Tan  
Executive Director  
CropLife Asia

Dr. Kanokwan Chodchoey  
Executive Director  
Asia and Pacific Seed Association