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Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees  
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Dear Committee Secretary

CropLife Australia (CropLife) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into *Higher education and skills training to support future demand in agriculture and agribusiness in Australia*. CropLife is the peak industry organisation representing the agricultural chemical and biotechnology (plant science) sector in Australia. CropLife represents the innovators, developers, manufacturers, formulators and registrants of crop protection and agro-biotechnology products. The plant science industry provides products to protect crops against pests, weeds and diseases, as well as developing crop biotechnologies that are key to the nation's agricultural productivity, sustainability and food security. The plant science industry is worth more than \$1.5 billion a year to the Australian economy and directly employs thousands of people across the country.

CropLife member companies spend more than \$13 million a year on stewardship activities to ensure the safe use of their products on the environment and human health. CropLife ensures the responsible use of these products through its industry Code of Conduct and has set a benchmark for industry stewardship through programs such as **drumMUSTER**, ChemClear<sup>®</sup> and Agsafe Accreditation and Training. This latter program manages workplace risks throughout the chemical supply chain and under the industry Code of Conduct, CropLife members must only supply agricultural chemical products to distributors, wholesalers and retailers that are accredited under the program.

Education and skills training plays a critically important role in ensuring that agricultural chemical products are used safely and sustainably without any adverse risks to human health, worker safety or the environment. When used incorrectly, or in the absence of appropriate safety measures and precautions, agricultural chemicals can sometimes present unacceptably raised risks.

Better, higher quality and more relevant agricultural training has the potential to improve agricultural production by facilitating more accurate and lower risk application of agricultural chemical products. Users that are better trained and have stringer skills can provide the human resources necessary for Australian innovators to produce new products, technologies and methodologies to develop and implement advanced applications.

Currently, modern Australian agriculture is hampered by a lack of credible education pathways and inconsistent training, licensing and accreditation requirements for users.

## ISSUES

- **Inconsistent regulatory environments**

Currently, education and training requirements for agricultural chemicals are set by various state based regulators. As a result, training and accreditation requirements for agricultural chemical access remain inconsistent. This inconsistency hinders interstate movement of chemical application services, increasing costs to farmers when accessing these services. Inconsistent training requirements require providers to develop specific courses and manuals that reflect the particular circumstances associated with each jurisdiction. Consistent regulation among all jurisdictions would facilitate greater investment in vocational training courses for chemical applicators.

For example, inconsistent workplace safety requirements with several jurisdictions delaying implementation of nationally consistent work health and safety laws diminish the incentive for workplaces to implement up-to-date training materials incorporating current and impending regulatory requirements.

CropLife does note that the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is currently developing proposals for a *National Harmonised System for the Control of Use of Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals* that may result in significantly harmonised rules and regulations relating to training for chemical use. CropLife strongly supports this initiative and is continuing to work with all governments to ensure that effective outcomes are achieved.

While harmonised regulations between jurisdictions will be essential for productivity and to facilitate trade, users and agronomists do require access to a staged and progressive professional development program in order to provide clear career paths for current agronomists and other chemical users.

- **Training and professional development resources**

Each year, CropLife and its member companies invest over \$13 million in product stewardship initiatives that include training and accreditation programs for users and other workers that come into contact with pesticide products. These programs are critical in reducing the risks associated with improperly used, handled and stored products, as well as ensuring that products are effective when used.

Vocational courses for users of products are well established, but farmers are often cynical regarding the utility of content. In the absence of strong regulatory regimes regulating the use of chemical products, and without newer, more advanced training for users seeking to update their learning, adoption by farmers remains patchy.

- **Education pathways facilitate investment in Australian-based research**

Australia's counter cyclical growing seasons in comparison to Europe and North America provide it with a natural advantage. Global companies seeking to commercialise new products can accelerate field trials by undertaking them in both the northern and southern hemisphere growing seasons. However, this investment is dependent on appropriately qualified and trained research personnel.

Globally, CropLife member companies invest approximately US\$4 billion each year in developing new products and technologies. Australian support for agricultural science would ensure that Australia is able to maintain access to cutting edge research and development funded by commercial enterprises for new products.

Facilitating Australian product development may also see Australian farmers benefit from having early access to more advanced crop protection products with consequent benefits for users, consumers and the environment.

## **CONCLUSION**

Australia's agricultural training and education systems currently provide only limited options for students and professionals to progress to more advanced qualifications. If these limitations were to result in reduced corporate investment in research and development in new chemical and crop biotechnology products, this would result in lost opportunities for productivity and sustainability improvements in Australian agriculture.

Yours sincerely

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**Chief Executive Officer**