

Plantwise Policy on Engaging Agro-Input Suppliers

Extension services and agro-input suppliers are two essential components of the plant health system that support farmers, particularly in developing countries. Agro-input suppliers provide essential commercial services to farmers, and Plantwise wishes to facilitate links between plant clinics and agro-input suppliers to optimise their roles and to further support implementation of the Plantwise policy on pesticide use and related national policies. This may include involving agro-input suppliers in awareness raising activities relevant to their role in a plant health system, such as informing them about the pest management decision guides used by plant doctors and the pesticide products that will and will not be prescribed at plant clinics.

Furthermore, Plantwise recognises the importance of training for all those involved in plant health systems including agro-input suppliers. In particular, those that sell pesticides should be capable of providing buyers with advice on risk reduction and efficient use. Although training of agro-input suppliers is seen primarily as the responsibility of the industry, if prioritised and resources are made available, Plantwise may develop training for agro-input suppliers on aspects of 'integrated pest management (IPM). However, training agro-input suppliers as plant doctors (specifically Modules 1 & 2) is not a planned activity and Plantwise does not anticipate allocating its resources to this activity.

Plantwise observes and supports the *FAO International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management* (FAO 2013¹⁰) which establishes voluntary standards of conduct for all public and private entities engaged in or associated with the distribution and use of pesticides. Furthermore, Plantwise observes any applicable national codes or regulations and supports its in-country partners and agro-input suppliers to do the same. Therefore, Plantwise will work only with government registered or approved agro-input suppliers where such schemes exist.

The role of extension staff, in particular those working in plant clinics, is that of a public service to provide diagnoses and advice to farmers, to help them achieve their objectives (increased agricultural production, increased profit, reduced risk, etc.). In contrast, agro-input suppliers are part of a commercial service to farmers, providing important inputs to increase agricultural productivity. They are set up based on a business model that is intended to generate financial benefits for the supplier (including income, turnover, profit, repeat business, influence) and any company to which the supplier is affiliated. It is in the long-term interest of the agro-input supplier to provide appropriate advice to farmers to help them achieve their objectives, and thereby sustain the agro-input supply business. However, in the shorter term, there is a potential conflict of interest if the supplier needs to prioritise commercial aspects such as income, turnover and profit instead of providing advice in the farmer's best interests.

This potential conflict of interest is exacerbated if extension staff are involved in the sale of agro-inputs to farmers. This would apply to all inputs for which a farmer may pay, but there is a particular problem with pesticides, which have the potential to damage human and environmental health. This was encapsulated in FAO's (2010) *Guidance on Pest and Pesticide Management Policy Development*¹¹: "A conflict of interest can exist when extension services that provide pest management advice are also involved in the sale of pesticides, particularly when extension staff need to supplement their income by sale of inputs, or when a lack of public extension services has resulted in pesticide retailers assuming the role of pest management advisors. In many countries, such conflict of interest has been a root cause of pesticide overuse." Plant doctors within the Plantwise programme should provide unbiased advice from which they do not personally profit, and Plantwise discourages plant doctors from becoming involved in selling agro-inputs for personal profit.

10. *International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management* (FAO, 2013)

11. *Guidance on Pest and Pesticide Management Policy Development* (FAO, 2010)

