

## Open Letter to the 4<sup>th</sup> International Rice Congress

The 4th International Rice Congress (**IRC2014**) is taking place 27 October - 1 November 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand. The **IRC2014** theme is "*Rice for the World*". The IRC is a quadrennial event that brings together researchers, government representatives, business interests, civil society participants, and rice producers.

This meeting of the IRC comes at an opportune time, when climate change, food insecurity and poverty are challenges to people's prosperity and our planet's sustainability. Rice is an important crop for food security, national economies, and ecological systems.

Given these challenges, we who work with the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) as scientists, practitioners, and private sector and government actors, are pleased to attend the Congress and to share the results of our research and field experience. We have abundant evidence that the use of SRI concepts and methods can contribute immediately and effectively to raising crop productivity, reducing rice crop water requirements, making crops more resistant to the hazards of climate change, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

2014 is the International Year of Family Farming – a reminder to the international community of its obligations to work with smallholder family farms to improve the quality of their lives and their farming systems. This year has galvanized concrete initiatives and policies aimed at mobilizing resources and improving access to land, water, and other inputs and natural resources. Smallholder farmers and their organizations have been working together to bring greater attention and resources to the promotion of agro-ecology and farmers' control over their production. Especially their ownership of seeds should be strengthened, ensuring respect to their rights and traditions.

It is important that IRC support agro-ecological production methods such as SRI, as these can utilize more productively the resources that are available to farmers with positive effects on soil and environmental quality. SRI is a principle-based management system that has gained wide popularity among resource-poor farmers, conscious consumers, social entrepreneurs, and sustainable supply chains. SRI management practices have been shown to give more productive plants (phenotypes) from practically all varieties (genotypes). Knowledge and use of SRI has spread largely through the efforts of international and national NGOs, farmers' organizations, and research organizations in over 50 countries.

This IRC has provided opportunities to share this knowledge and experience, but we hope that the 5<sup>th</sup> Congress will give greater attention to agro-ecological practices and opportunities such as SRI given the productivity and sustainability challenges that agriculture faces. SRI can provide multiple benefits to farmers, their communities, and the environment: reducing water usage, increasing yield and input efficiency, and improving resilience in a changing climate. These modifications in practice are changing the lives of farmers and their communities. As a

part of a larger agro-ecological movement, SRI is also helping to address the vitally important issues of justice in food and agriculture – that is, who gets access to what resources and how these decisions get made. There are over 600 publications, including the large body of scientific research from China, which provide scientific validation and explanation for these ideas and methods.

We would like to work with the International Rice Research Institute and the rest of the rice science community to address the pressing issues facing rice farmers. Farmers are not only producers; they are innovators, particularly when the right conditions exist to build on their knowledge of the specific techniques that work in their respective situations, taking into account their natural resource constraints, soil conditions and weather patterns, as well as social and cultural considerations.

**We would like to draw the attention of the global rice community to:**

- Collaborate with farmers’ organizations on research that is particularly relevant to improving the situation of resource-limited and food-insecure rice farmers, developing more beneficial sustainable value chains, more adequate technologies and investment, and improving market access.
- Give more attention to issues of concern to farmers and their organizations, such as risk management at the plot and landscape levels, models for accessing financing credit that work for farmers, and land tenure issues. Also, attention needs to be given to producing small farm machinery that can help farmers overcome constraints such as labor.
- Involve farmers and their organizations in the design of research: farmers’ organizations should be endowed with more capacity for independent analysis, critical assessment and monitoring.
- Work with the SRI community, which includes a wide range of disciplines and occupations. Our experience and research is showing that by providing more conducive growing environments to rice plants their genetic potentials can be more fully expressed for the benefit of both farmers and consumers.

**Sincerely,**

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