Open Letter to the 4th 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 5th 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,

Le Nguyet Minh  Erika Styger
Global Agriculture Advisor  Director of SRI-Rice
Oxfam  Cornell University

Please direct return correspondence to Ms. Le Nguyet Minh at leminh@oxfamamerica.org. Correspondence will be forwarded to the individuals who have endorsed the letter.
Signing on behalf of:

Iswandi Anas, Ph.D.
Bogor Agricultural University (IPB), Bogor Indonesia Head of Soil Biotechnology, Division Advisor to Indonesian SRI Association
Indonesia

Lakoussan Aurélien
Coordinator, CRCOPR (Cadre Regional des Riziculteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest)
West Africa

B.C. Barah, Ph.D.
Indian Agricultural Research Institute
Representative, National Consortium on SRI in India (NCS)
New Delhi, India

Edward W. Baxter
Executive Director, SRI Global Inc.
Ithaca, New York, USA

Sarah K. Belfort
Program Policy Advisor, Oxfam America
Boston, MA, USA

Faliry Boly
Representative, CRCOPR (Cadre Regional des Riziculteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest) / ROPPA (Réseau des Organisations des Paysans Producteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest)
West Africa

Bui Van Minh
Sustainable Agriculture and Value Chain Advisor, SNV (Netherlands Development Organization)
Hanoi, Vietnam

Gina E. Castillo, Ph.D.
Agriculture Program Manager, Oxfam America
Boston, MA, USA

Dao The Anh, Ph.D.
Deputy Director General, Field Crops Research Institute (FCRI)
Vietnam
Febri Doni, B.Sc., M.Sc.
Universiti Kebangsaan
Malaysia

Zhoucen Feng
Research Assistant, SRI-Rice
Ithaca, NY, USA

Chaminda Fernando
Economic Justice Technical Coordinator, Oxfam
Colombo, Sri Lanka

Pascal Gbenou
CRCOPR (Cadre Regional des Riziculteurs de l’Afrique de l’Ouest)/SAIN
Benin

Anizan Isahak
UKM, Mas-SRI
Malaysia

Sanjeewanie Ginigaddara, Ph.D.
Rajarata University
Sri Lanka

Pratyaya Jagannath
Consultant, Kabil
New Delhi, India

Devon Jenkins
Technical Specialist, Cornell University (SRI-Rice Center)
Ithaca, NY, USA

Amir Kassam, OBE, FSB
Convener, Land Husbandry Group, Tropical Agriculture Association (TAA)
Professor, University of Reading
United Kingdom

Kaneka Keo
Regional Policy Advisor, East Asia Regional Office, Oxfam
Phnom Penh, Cambodia
Ram Bahadur Khadka  
Scientist, Regional Agricultural Research Station, Nepal Agricultural Research Council (NARC)  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Luong Dinh Lan  
Program Coordinator, Oxfam  
Vietnam

Stephen Leinau  
Executive Director, EarthLinks  
Santa Cruz, CA, USA

Abha Mishra, Ph.D.  
Team Leader, Mekong SRI Regional Project  
Co-Director, Asian Center of Innovation for Sustainable Agriculture Intensification (ACISAI)  
Asian Institute of Technology  
Thailand

Daniel Oporto  
Agriculture Sector Leader, SNV (Netherlands Development Organization)  
Vietnam

Wininga P. Bernadette Outtara  
Regional Coordinator, VECO  
West Africa

Hoang Van Phu, Ph.D.  
Director, International Cooperation Center, Thai Nguyen University  
Vietnam

A. Ravindra  
Watershed Support Services and Activities Network  
Secunderabad, India

Sabarmatee  
Ph.D. Candidate, Wageningen University  
Netherlands

Debashish Sen  
People’s Science Institute (PSI)
Dehradun, India

Kelly Schut, MSc
Country Representative in the Philippines, Caritas Czech Republic
Basey, Samar, Philippines

Amod Kumar Thakur, Ph.D.
Senior Scientist, Directorate of Water Management
Orissa, India

Gaoussou Traore, Ph.D.
Regional Coordinator, SRI-WAAP (West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program), Coordinator of the National Center of Specialization on Rice (CNS-RIZ/IER), WAAP Mali

Tuyet Truong
Lecturer, Thai Nguyen University
Vietnam

Emmanuel Tumusiime
Researcher, Oxfam America
Washington, D.C., USA

Marguerite Uphoff, MD, MPH, FAAP
Ithaca, NY, USA

Norman Uphoff, Ph.D.
Professor of Government and International Agriculture, Cornell University
Ithaca, NY, USA

Rajendra Uprety, Ph.D.
Senior Agriculture Development Officer
Morang, Nepal

Olivia Vent
SRI Liaison, Lotus Foods
Richmond, CA, USA

All institutional affiliations provided for identification purposes only and do not imply endorsement by the respective institutions.