August 7, 2009

Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Honorable Secretary Clinton,

The American Society of Agronomy (ASA) is in full support of your expressed positions on the importance of deploying “cutting-edge technology” to raise crop yields.

We endorse your views that India’s leadership in agriculture is absolutely crucial and the importance of the Obama administration's focus on global hunger and malnutrition. We note that you have pledged to "work and support" Indian initiatives.

As you are aware, India has 3% of the world’s crop land but feeds 17% of the world’s population. Along with your stated position, ASA believes it is important to accelerate in a short period of time the growth of agricultural productivity in South Asia.

As part of this effort, ASA is developing and will implement a highly qualified workforce program for private and public sector Extension by establishing a Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) program in South Asia. The main target for this program will be the frontline agronomists employed by private companies, non-government organizations, and public sector agencies. Certification by ASA ensures that crop advisers are competent in all aspects of crop production and provide services in an ethical manner.

ASA has partnered in the Cereal System Initiative for South Asia (CSISA), which as you are likely aware, brings together a range of organizations to enable sustainable cereal production in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. CSISA is led by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) and three other centers with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation of $19.59 million, the State Department’s USAID contributing more than $10 million, and the World Bank’s $0.5 million, during the first three years of the program.

This program comes at a decisive time for key nations in the South Asian region—home to 40% of the world's poor with nearly half a billion people subsisting on less than U.S.$1 a day—as they struggle to boost grain supplies in the wake of growing demand and strained natural resources. The project, which builds on past cereal research achievements in the public and private sectors, aims to produce an additional 5 million tons of grain annually and increase the yearly incomes of 6 million poor rural households by at least $350.

We hope you will agree that our program is extremely important for the food supply of the most populous region of the world. We are honored to take part in this initiative with USAID and IRRI. Our objective is to help build locally focused Certified Crop Adviser programs to deliver higher quality production recommendations that will result in the more efficient use of expensive resources, better protection of the environment and a higher quality of life for producers in India and the South Asia region.
The Certified Crop Adviser program, www.certifiedcropadviser.org, administered by ASA and overseen by an international board of directors, is a voluntary certification program for individuals that provide advice to growers on crop management and inputs. The CCA program continues its success in North America since its inception in 1992. The certification gives growers assurance that advisers are competent in all aspects of crop production, up-to-date on the latest in crop management and government mandates, and provides all services in an ethical manner.

The American Society of Agronomy, founded in 1907, is a scientific society dedicated to the development of agriculture enabled by science, in harmony with environmental and human values. The Society supports scientific, educational, and professional activities to enhance communication and technology transfer among agronomists and those in related disciplines on topics of local, regional, national, and international significance. The society is based in Madison, Wisconsin. We help our 8,000+ members and 13,000+ certified professionals advance the disciplines and practices of agronomy by supporting professional growth and science policy initiatives, and by publishing research publications. To learn more about our organization and ways we can collaborate, please visit www.agronomy.org.

We look forward to learning about opportunities to work with you and your staff on international initiatives with an agriculture focus. To this end, we invite you and your staff to attend our International Annual Meetings, November 1-5 in Pittsburgh, PA. At these meetings, international agronomists, crop scientists, and soil scientists meet under the umbrella of international research exchange in the areas of agriculture production, biofuels, climate change, plant breeding, forestry, rangeland science, environmental quality, and related disciplines. We hope you and your staff could join us to see first-hand how extraordinary the information exchange is among our member scientists and certified professionals at the meetings.

Additionally, we understand that you will be a featured keynote speaker at the upcoming World Food Prize in Des Moines, Iowa in mid-October. We greatly appreciate your announcing this year’s winner of the Prize, Dr. Gebisa Ejeta, who will be further honored in Des Moines. Dr. Ejeta has been a long-time American Society of Agronomy member and a number of our leadership will be attending the World Food Prize meetings. If we can provide you any additional information or if you foresee opportunities for our societies to assist with any additional projects that you and your staff identify, we would be very happy to schedule a meeting in order to achieve such objectives.

We look forward to continuing our support of your work and that of the Department of State.

Sincerely yours,

Marcus M. Alley, ASA President
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Ellen G.M. Bergfeld, Chief Executive Officer
American Society of Agronomy