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Q: How has the performance of Syngenta been globally and in India in the last few years?

Through our integrated offers and continuous innovation, we increase crop yield and quality worldwide while making growers' lives easier. We are helping to accelerate technology adoption in the emerging markets, where we have achieved annual double digit growth since the launch of our strategy in 2011. In 2014, we achieved our integrated sales target of six percent at constant exchange rates. Globally sales increased by 5 percent (CER) to 15.1 billion, with a 1 percent improvement in EBITDA. Emerging markets registered double digit growth for the fifth consecutive year and now contribute more than half the company's revenues. A negative impact from currencies, notably those of the CIS, resulted in an EBITDA margin slightly below the previous year.

Revenues from Syngenta's India operations grew at a faster rate than global revenues despite a poor southwest monsoon in the country. We hope to maintain revenue growth of 20 percent or better this trend in India in the current year as well.

Q: How has agriculture in India transformed for good or worse in the last few decades?

Indian agriculture has made significant strides in the past few decades. It has met the challenge of securing the production of basic staples like rice and wheat by leveraging green revolution technology, including the introduction of high-yield seed varieties, input management and improved water management systems. The Indian farmer has not only matched domestic demand growth but enabled record production of food grains and has become one of the world's top producers of rice, wheat, pulses, cotton, spices, fruits and vegetables.

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Recent policies have opened up new avenues for agriculture modernization. But there are also unprecedented challenges like climate change, fragmented landholdings, low productivity, limited deployment of technology, lack of labor and India's population which is predicted to increase by half a billion by 2050, requiring a substantial increase in food production.

Q: Which opportunities areasÂ in India are still under-utilized?Â

According to a report by Mc Kinsey, rising affluence and a growing population is likely to increase India's overall food consumption by 4 percent per annum to reach Rs 23 lakh crore by 2030. This represents a huge investment opportunity across the food chain. But the agriculture sector is still to realize its full potential in terms of yield. Given the country's agro-climatic conditions, the sector fulfils only 50-60 per cent of the potential yield for most crops and growth rates of productivity remain far below global standards. Promoting modern technology driven agriculture is not only the solution for eradicating poverty and hunger but also a vehicle for enlarged employment opportunities. Due to reducing farm labor there is an opportunity for promoting scale neutral technologies and farm mechanization through public-private partnership efforts. It is also heartening to see the government's intentions to bridge the gap between agriculture and innovation. The Prime Minister's emphasis to bring results of the laboratories to the farms, the recent launch of the soil health card scheme and directions given to state governments to set up expert committees to work out a common minimum program for boosting the agriculture sector are steps in the right direction.

Increasing the efficiency of the farm to fork value chain will also be crucial for eliminating poverty and malnutrition. By building an efficient and effective supply chain using state of the art techniques it is possible to serve the population with value added food while simultaneously ensuring remunerative prices to the farmers. Private sector participation in processing, branding and marketing that drove the agriculture and food sector in several developed and middle-income countries can help in addressing some of the challenges. The development of agro based industries can help reduce regional imbalances and generate employment opportunities on a large scale for the rural masses.

Q: What are the challenges in regulations and business operations that you feel need to be addressed?

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The government is keen to look at international best practices, capacity building and is eager to bring in new innovations at a faster pace for the farming community. The regulatory environment has improved significantly allowing us to bring latest technologies in the areas of crop protection in recent years. There is further scope to shorten the entire registration process by 1-2 years so that the Indian farmers get the benefits of global innovation. Bringing a new crop protection product to India takes almost 7 years, which includes two years of internal profiling and five years of regulatory work.

Q: What are the new technologies that you feel have a promising future in agriculture?

Syngenta believes that all farmers should be able to choose the best available technologies and products, including biotechnology, to meet their crop production needs in a sustainable way.Â Biotech crops are helping farmers around the world improve productivity, secure and increase yields, produce higher quality crops and reduce the environmental footprint of modern agriculture.Â If India is to feed an estimated 1.7 billion people by 2050, then GM and other biotechnology options should be available to farmers. They are not a "silver bullet," but they are certainly important tools for addressing the challenges facing agriculture.Â It is important to look at biotechnology also in the context of climate change. GM technology helps crops fight various climatic stresses that affect growth like moisture, drought etc.

Q: Shouldn't the companies do more to empower farmers financially and socially?

Yes, absolutely. Over 2.5 billion people - including more than half the world's extreme poor - directly depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. They are critical to the world's food security, yet they face high financial risks and low returns. Our aim is to make farming more productive, efficient and profitable by providing farmers the requisite tools and training. Indian agriculture is dominated by small farmers. 86 percent have landholdings of less than two hectares but cultivate 44 percent of the farmland and their contribution to farm output exceeds 50 percent. Syngenta focuses on addressing the needs of these smallholders with better seeds, chemistries, agronomic best practices and integrated solutions that help them sustainably grow more food while ensuring a higher Return on Investment.

Syngenta contributes to the economies and communities where we operate through various programs. For example; Syngenta's commitment to address child labor issues and improve overall agriculture working conditions started in 2003 through a global partnership with the Fair Labor Association. Syngenta launched an India-wide program called 'Syngenta Me & Mine' in 2009 to build tangible and practical commitments from vegetable seed growers so they had a sense of ownership in the outcomes for their families and communities. Another program Sparsh, is being run by our global supply base Santa Monica Works in Goa. It contributes to areas of education, skill development, waste management, health and hygiene, women empowerment and socio-cultural initiatives for hundreds of families living around our Goa site.