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ASIA EDITION

Novozymes: Few fungus a day keeps pests away

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Singapore: Global industrial biotechnology company Novozymes has discovered a fungus that provides a biological solution for high value fruit and vegetable crops asÃ?Â well as ornamental plants. Pesky bugs including thrips, mites, whiteflies and vine weevils cause more than $100 million in damage to farmers' crops every year. OverÃ?Â time, insects can become resistant to pesticides leaving farmers' valuable crops at risk.

Novozymes' fungus, contained in the product MET52 EC, is commonly found in soil. The fungus leaves no chemical residue, has little potential for resistance and canÃ?Â be used with traditional insecticides. After a susceptible insect makes contact with the fungus, spores grow on the insect's surface, invade its body and kill it. TheÃ?Â fungus is harmless to most non-target, beneficial insects like the rove beetle. MET52 EC is currently available to growers in the US, with plans to expand globally inÃ?Â the near future.

"A few microbes a day can keep the pests away. It's a simple solution to a decades-old agricultural problem," said Mr Colin Bletsky, Novozymes BioAg globalÃ?Â business development director. "We appreciate the important role farmers play in providing our food, and we are happy to help them protect the crops they work soÃ?Â hard to grow."

With renewed US focus on health and nutrition in light of the national obesity epidemic, demand for fruits and vegetables is expected to outpace population growth. The US Department of Agriculture launched its new dietary guidelines in 2011 called 'MyPlate', encouraging Americans to fill half their plate with fruits and vegetables.

An additional driver promoting increased consumption of vegetables and fruit is the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008. The legislationÃ?Â provides grants to states to provide free fresh fruits and vegetables for students in low-income schools.

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