



## **WORLD FOOD SECURITY: CAN PRIVATE SECTOR R&D FEED THE POOR?**

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### **UNIQUE MODEL FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE COLLABORATION BRINGS INNOVATIVE CROPS FOR AFRICAN FARMERS**

**Monsanto and CIMMYT representatives discussed the benefits and challenges of their work together under a project to reduce crop failure and alleviate hunger and poverty in sub-Saharan Africa**

In a joint presentation today on a public-private research partnership aimed at offering greater hope and security—in the form of drought tolerant varieties—to smallholder African farmers and their drought-stricken maize crops, two key project participants jointly offered perspectives about the challenges faced and how they are dealing with them.

The joint presentation was given by Dr Thomas A. Lumpkin, director general of the non-profit International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and Ms Janice Armstrong, Vice-President, Monsanto Corporate Affairs for Asia-Pacific and China, at the 2009 Crawford Fund International Conference “World Food Security: Can Private Sector R&D Feed the Poor?” in Parliament House Canberra on 27-28 October.

Speakers including senior Federal politicians, senior representatives from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The UN World Food Program, A Green Revolution in Africa, Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture and DuPont addressed the intersecting roles of the private, not for profit and public sectors in global food security and how to get the private sector better engaged for the benefit of the rural poor.

In welcoming delegates to the event, The Hon Neil Andrew AO, chairman of the Crawford Fund, noted that while some technologies, such as the mobile phone, flourish in the developing world, desperately needed agricultural technologies don't find their way to the countries that need them.

"While this is an issue giving rise to considerable controversy, especially questions such as intellectual property rights, multinational profits, the development of GMOs for the developing world and biopiracy, the private sector can and does provide much-needed R&D," he said.

"The challenges of a non-profit and a private company working together this way are immense," said Thomas A. Lumpkin, director general of the non-profit International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), which is partnering with the private agricultural company, Monsanto, and national agricultural research systems in five African nations in the Water Efficient Maize for Africa (WEMA) project, led by the non-profit African Agricultural Technology Foundation (AATF).

"Despite the difficulties, all parties are showing determination, creativity, and good faith to reach the shared vision of bringing smallholder farmers in Africa the tools needed to increase productivity for better food and income security."

"As we speak, a terrible drought in the eastern Africa has threatened 20 million people in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda with famine," said Armstrong. "The WEMA partnership enables improvements in drought tolerance for African farmers that would not be possible with any technology or organization alone."

WEMA was launched in 2008 in response to a growing call by African farmers, leaders, and scientists to address the devastating effects of drought on small-scale farmers and their families. The partners are using conventional breeding, marker-assisted breeding and biotechnology to develop African maize varieties with the long-term goal of making drought-tolerant maize available royalty-free to small-scale farmers in Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.

Maize is the most widely-grown staple crop in the region: more than 300 million Africans depend on it as their main food source. It is severely affected by frequent drought. The collaboration between CIMMYT and the national agricultural research systems has already yielded excellent gains in drought tolerance through conventional breeding.

The partners in WEMA expect the combination of advanced breeding and biotechnology to bring even greater gains, according to Armstrong.

"We estimate that the maize products developed over the next 10 years could increase yields by 20 to 35 percent under moderate drought, compared to current varieties," she said.

"This increase would translate into about two million additional tons of food during drought years in the participating countries, meaning 14 to 21 million people would have more to eat and sell."

According to Lumpkin, partners are confronting challenges that include the varied status of regulatory frameworks in participating countries, the timely conduct of field trials and data collection, the deployment of genetically-modified maize, and managing intellectual property.

"In addition to this," he said, "we're working to increase factual knowledge about the project and its aims, to help promote an enabling environment, and to manage expectations about project timeframes for delivery and impacts."

Both Armstrong and Lumpkin cited the important institutional differences among partners, including organizational histories, cultures, expectations, and challenges on information sharing, confidentiality, and intellectual property protection.

"Women in the Congo have a proverb: 'A single bracelet does not jingle,'" said Armstrong. "We have all shown respect for the diversity between institutions and regions, and believe that all partners will benefit in the end."

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Howard G. Buffett Foundation are funding the project.

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Further press [materials](#) and [background](#) on website or by contacting Cathy Reade, 0413575934

The Crawford Fund's mission is to increase Australia's engagement in international agricultural research, development and education for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.

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