



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

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IMPROVING SEED AVAILABILITY FOR THE POOR - ICRISAT'S PUBLIC-PRIVATE SUCCESS STORY

Poorer farmers could benefit dramatically if there was a shift in the emphasis of private R&D investment in seeds, animal health products, fertilizer and other innovations from developed country markets to the developing world.

This was the message given by *CL Laxmipathi Gowda* from *International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT)* speaking 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 Monsanto, 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 GMO's for the developing world and biopiracy, the private sector can and does provide much-needed R&D," he said.

Dr Gowda told the conference public-private partnerships can dramatically improve the quality of crops grown by poorer farmers in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and explained how ICRISAT has partnered with more than 50 public-private seed companies in India, Indonesia, Egypt and Mexico through the consortium approach to deliver its improved hybrids and varieties to the developing world.

"In 2000, ICRISAT and private seed companies initiated the Hybrid Parents Research Consortium as a novel public-private research and development partnership for improving the availability of seeds of high yielding cultivars. ICRISAT develops and provides early and advanced generation breeding materials to partners. Private sector partners select best parents, test, multiply and market high-yielding hybrids through their well-established market networks in the rural areas," he said.

“This approach optimizes the complementary expertise and synergies among public sector International Agriculture Research Centers (IARCs) in conducting basic research to improve germplasm and the private sector in developing and marketing seeds of improved cultivars. This facilitates the IARC global research agenda of delivering International Public Goods (IPGs) to benefit poor farmers.”

ICRISAT is mandated to work on sorghum, pearl millet, chickpea, pigeonpea and groundnut – all of which are staple food crops for the poorest people in the dry areas. ICRISAT has successfully utilized public-private partnerships in improving these types of crops.

“These crops are grown on marginal lands, with poor soil fertility and erratic rainfall leading to low yields, often less than one ton per hectare, although potential yields are up to 10 tons per hectare. ICRISAT partners with both public and private sector institutions to increase productivity by ensuring that seeds of high-yielding varieties and hybrids are available to poor farmers at an affordable price and at the right time and place,” he stated.

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Speakers at this year’s Crawford Fund annual event include:

- *The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs opening the event;*
- *The Hon Bob McMullan MP, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance making the inaugural Sir John Crawford Memorial Address;*
- *Ms Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program;*
- *Dr Prabhu Pingali of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation;*
- *Dr Marco Ferroni, Executive Director, Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture;*
- *Dr Namanga Ngongi , President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa;*
- *Ms Janice Armstrong from Monsanto Company*
- *Professor Philip Pardey, an internationally renowned Australian agricultural economist*
- *Leaders from public good international and Australian agricultural research centres*

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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