



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

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REVITALISING AGRICULTURAL R&D TO FEED THE WORLD

Food around the world is likely to become scarcer and more expensive if developed and developing countries fail to bolster their investments in agricultural research.

This was the message given by Professor Philip Pardey, Professor of Science and Technology Policy, the Department of Applied Economics, and Director of the University of Minnesota's International Science and Technology Practice and Policy Center.

Professor Pardey was 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, DuPont 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 GMOs for the developing world and biopiracy, the private sector can and does provide much-needed R&D," he said.

Professor Pardey, an internationally renowned Australian agricultural economist, shared with the conference his latest research which documents a slowdown since 1990 in the growth rate of general agricultural productivity and in the growth rates of yields of specific crops including corn, rice, wheat and soybeans — the world's major food and feed crops.

"The long-term consequences of a continuing slowdown in agricultural productivity growth could be dire, with more than one billion people around the world already suffering from malnutrition," he said.

"It is critical that all countries revitalize their investments in agricultural research and development, which has been the main driver of long-term growth in agricultural productivity. Creatively engaging the private sector in achieving sustainable agricultural growth will be critical as well."

Professor Pardey noted that a number of factors — including climate change, land degradation, shifts to less productive areas, higher resource costs, evolving pests and diseases, and changes in governmental policies — have all contributed to the slowdown in agricultural productivity growth.

"A substantial share of the slowdown in productivity growth can also be blamed on a slowdown in the growth rate of public and private investment in agricultural research and development, combined with a shift in research emphasis."

He noted that some research and development funds that were allocated for agriculture in recent decades have been redirected from productivity towards improving food safety and product quality as well as to medical, energy and industrial uses of agricultural commodities.

“Research and development have helped maintain yields as new pests, diseases and other environmental problems arise. Development of new knowledge and technology has historically resulted in more abundant supplies of food at more affordable prices.”

“While recognizing the undesirable environmental effects of some agricultural practices, on balance the intensification of agriculture has spared much natural and often fragile habitats from conversion to agricultural lands, with major environmental and biodiversity benefits.”

He told the conference that such investments have benefited industrialized countries as well as developing nations, where more efficient agricultural systems can help alleviate hunger and poverty and reduce pressure on natural resources.

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Other 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;*
- *Dr Bill Niebur, DuPont Vice President, Crop Genetics R&D*
- *Ms Janice Armstrong from Monsanto Company*
- *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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