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

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VIRTUAL CENTRE FOR FERTILIZER R&D
- RECENT TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES OPEN NEW OPPORTUNITIES

For the world to be provided with the next generation of fertilizers, the private sector must play a significant role in partnership with public institutions. A new Virtual Centre of Excellence for Fertilizer R&D will pave the way for these partnerships.

This was the message given by Dr Amit Roy, President and Chief Executive Officer, International Fertilizer Development Center (IFDC) - an international centre dedicated to food security and agricultural sustainability through improved soil fertility and fertiliser R&D.

Dr Roy 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, 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 Roy reported that IFDC is preparing to launch a “Virtual Center of Excellence for Fertilizer R&D,” with IFDC providing leadership and serving as the hub for the Centre.

“There have been significant food and fertilizer crises during the past few years, with dramatic price swings and shortages. Because of these crises, IFDC recognizes that the time has come for a bold new research initiative to create the next generation of fertilizers and production technologies needed to help feed the world’s growing population and provide sustainable food security.” Dr Roy said.

“The need for new and innovative research is a global issue and thus requires a global solution. This “virtual research centre” will tap the world’s intellectual capacity to address this issue. The centre will partner with universities, public and private research laboratories and the global fertilizer industry to bring together the best scientific, business and government minds to create a research system that challenges the current state of knowledge and considers new and non-traditional paradigms,” he reported.

Dr Roy noted that according to the World Watch Institute, the world population stood at 6.8 billion in early 2009 and could reach 9.4 billion by 2050. More than 95 percent of the population growth is occurring in Africa and Asia, which already account for three-fourths of the global population.

“Even though land remains that could be converted to agricultural production, particularly in Africa, the environmental cost of doing so is increasing,” Dr Roy said.

The UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization says that Asia and the Pacific region have the largest number of hungry people – 642 million – followed by Sub-Saharan Africa with 265 million.

“Fertilizer research and development can make a major contribution in addressing the challenges faced by Africa and Asia. Global food security depends on a focused effort to improve soil fertility and increase productivity of food crops, and fertilizer plays a major role.

“The production and use of current fertilizer products are quite inefficient and must be improved. Much of the nutrient content of current products is wasted because only 30 to 40 percent is absorbed by crops. This absorption rate can be improved by better application techniques and products.” Dr Roy reported.

“Recent advances in nanotechnology and biotechnology open new opportunities for collaborative research between the public and private sectors. To provide the world the next generation of fertilizers, the private sector must play a significant role in partnership with public institutions.”

Dr Roy suggested ways in which governments can support the cause including the use of vouchers for smallholder farmers.

“Input voucher programs are a pro-poor, market-friendly means of providing direct “market-smart” subsidies or crop production credits to resource-poor farmers. These programs can also be used to ensure emergency market recovery following droughts or other emergency situations. Similar programs have been implemented by IFDC in Afghanistan, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria and Rwanda.”

“Reducing nutrient losses is a critical step toward improving soil fertility and the agricultural productivity of poor farmers. There are several methods that can improve fertilizer use efficiency. IFDC is well-known for at least two of these methods: integrated soil fertility management (ISFM) and urea deep placement (UDP).”

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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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