



CRAWFORD FUND Media Release

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DOOMSDAY VAULT CONSERVING FARMING'S FUTURE

Freezing millions of seeds that represent the entire agricultural diversity of the planet may seem a little extreme, but the future of humanity may one day rely on such a “doomsday vault”.

A planned ice cave will house about three million packages, each containing hundreds of seeds from a different crop variety, according to Dr Cary Fowler, Executive Director of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, who carried out a feasibility study on the seed cave and is visiting Australia until 4 February.

“This ‘Noah’s Ark for Seeds’ is just one of the measures to be supported by the Global Crop Diversity Trust, which seeks to salvage the world’s most important crop collections and guarantee their ongoing healthy and safe conservation,” said Dr Fowler, author of several books on plant genetic resources and more than 75 articles on the topic in agriculture, law, development and social science journals.

Dr Fowler is here to thank Australia for its generous contribution to the Trust and to meet with key partners, such as AusAID, the Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC), and the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research.

“Agricultural plant biodiversity has shrunk rapidly. Just 120 species now provide 90% of all plant-derived human food. We have already lost a substantial amount of the genetic diversity of agricultural crops,” said Dr Fowler, a passionate advocate for conservation and use of crop diversity.

“Australia has been setting an international example on biodiversity conservation, while making very good use of crop diversity for developing pest and disease resistant plants for its farmers,” he explained.

“Australia tops the donor table with pledges to the Trust of US\$10m from AusAID and US\$5m from the GRDC. You have also got an Australian National Genetic Resource Centre on the drawing board, and Australia recently announced plans to ratify the UN’s International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture”.

“This significant support not only makes Australia a good global citizen, but makes good sense given that Australian agriculture depends heavily on crops that originated in other countries,” said Dr Fowler.

“For example, more than 90% of Australia’s wheat crop has some ancestry from the seedbank at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center in Mexico (CIMMYT), yielding a net annual benefit to your farmers of some \$70 million,” he said.

“You have also had tremendous success from access to the diverse gene reserves for barley and lentils from the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas; and for chickpea, pigeonpea and sorghum from the International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics”.

For an interview with Cary Fowler contact Cathy Reade, Crawford Fund, 0413 575 934. Additional information on The Global Crop Diversity Trust at (www.startwithaseed.org)