



# MEDIA RELEASE

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## THE WORLD WATER CRISIS: FACT OR FICTION?

One of the world's leading experts on water use and management today questioned whether there was a world water crisis or not.

"I would like to dispel some of the myths behind the world water crisis and lay out some of the real issues that define water scarcity across the globe," said Professor Frank Rijsberman, Director General of the International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

Professor Rijsberman was speaking today at the 4th International Crop Science Congress in Brisbane. The Congress has brought together over 1000 delegates from 65 countries to focus on the key issues for cropping systems that provide food, feed and fibre for the world.

"Fresh water is critical to an array of global challenges from health, to malnutrition, to poverty, and sustainable natural resources management," said Professor Rijsberman.

"But the fact that 1.2 billion people lack access to safe and affordable water for their domestic use does not necessarily indicate water scarcity. People usually lack access to water because service delivery is poor, or because they do not have money to pay for available water services," he said.

According to Professor Rijsberman there is no commonly accepted definition of water scarcity.

"Whether an area qualifies as "water scarce" depends on how people's needs are defined – and whether the needs of the environment - the water for nature - are taken into account. This means it is often difficult to assess whether water is truly scarce in the physical sense, a supply problem, or whether it is available but should be used better, a demand problem."

"Nevertheless, it is clear that up to two thirds of the world's population will be affected by water scarcity over the coming decades," he says.

Professor Rijsberman reported that one of the main drivers of future water scarcity rests largely with the way water is managed in agriculture. On average, it takes roughly seventy times more water to grow food for people than the amount people use for domestic purposes.

"People require thousands of litres of water per day to produce their food, depending on their diet and lifestyle," says Professor Rijsberman.

### 4th International Crop Science Congress

ABN 90 094 380 560

26 September –  
1 October 2004

Brisbane, Australia

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For example, the production process to yield one kilogram of cereal grains requires about one cubic meter (m<sup>3</sup>), or a thousand litres of water. However, one kilogram of meat requires much more water to produce. In California about 13.5 m<sup>3</sup> of water is used to produce one kilogram of beef.

“A typical diet of a person from USA requires about 5,400 litres of water per day. A vegetarian diet with approximately the same nutritional value is responsible for the consumption of 2,600 litres of water per day,” said Professor Rijsberman.

“In a scenario developed by IWMI, 29 percent more irrigated land will be required by the year 2025 to feed the world’s growing population. With gains in water productivity and more efficient water use, the increase in diversions to agriculture would be 17 percent. But a balance also needs to be struck between the water needs of the environment. Research indicates that if water is to be used to sustain natural ecosystems, there would need to be an 8 percent decrease in the amount of water diverted to irrigation,” he said.

“Australia’s evolving system of water governance, with its cap on development in the Murray-Darling basin, system of tradable rights and experimentation with returning water from use in agriculture back to the environment, is an interesting case in point,” said Professor Rijsberman.

“The most important question in the current debate on water scarcity is not so much whether it is true or not, whether we are going to run out of water or not, whether water scarcity is fact or fiction, but whether this debate will help increase water productivity,” concluded Professor Rijsberman.

#### **More information:**

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#### **Background:**

In addition to key Australian speakers, plenary speakers from around the world include:

- M S Swaminathan, ‘father of the Green Revolution’ and World Food Prize winner, acclaimed by TIME magazine as one of the twenty most influential Asians of the 20th century. He is also co-chair of the UN Hunger Task Force
- Dr Yanhua Liu, Vice Minister, Ministry Of Science & Technology, PR China
- Professor John Snape, Head of Crop Genetics, John Innes Centre, UK

Many issues are involved in the Congress themes of:

- ◇ addressing water scarcity
- ◇ sustainable management of soil and the environment
- ◇ harnessing genetics and crop genetic improvement in all its guises
- ◇ effecting desirable change by and for farmers

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