

MEDIA RELEASE

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Media are welcome to attend and prearranged interviews are encouraged.

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CONSUMERS 'TAKING A BIG BITE OUT OF THE EARTH'

Every meal served costs the planet 10 kilos of soil, 800 litres of fresh water and 1.3 litres of diesel fuel.

"That's what it takes to feed the typical person for just one meal – and when you multiply it by 7.2 billion people each eating around a thousand meals a year, our modern food system is devouring a vast amount of resources unsustainably," said Julian Cribb, opening keynote speaker at the Olympics of Horticulture.

Mr Cribb will be speaking to over 3000 delegates from more than 100 countries who will attend the International Horticulture Congress (IHC2014) – the world premier horticulture event - in Brisbane from 17-22 August at the Brisbane Exhibition and Convention Centre. It will mark the 150th anniversary of the International Society for Horticultural Science.

IHC2014 includes the world's leading experts in horticulture science to highlight issues related to the unique potential of horticulture to impact broadly on the key issues of modern society – health, wealth and an improved environment.

"Eating is our largest personal impact on the planet – but few people appreciate how big it is," says Mr Cribb, author of "The Coming Famine: the global food crisis and how we can avoid it" (UCP 2010).

"The world currently loses around 75 billion tonnes of topsoil a year. Despite progress in some countries, global soil degradation is getting worse, not better. At such rates, scientists are warning we could run short of good farming soils within 50-70 years."

Mr Cribb says the picture is similar for water, with more than 4000 cubic kilometres of groundwater being extracted – most of it unsustainably – every year. Places such as north China, the Indo-Gangetic region, the Middle East and Midwest USA face critical water shortages by the 2030s. Meanwhile huge cities and gas companies are grabbing the farmers' remaining water – making the task of feeding the world so much harder.

"Most governments and consumers fail to recognise that scarcities of water, land, oil, nutrients, technology, fish and finance are now acting in sync – and being amplified by climate shocks.

"Equally important is the fact that three out of every four people in affluent societies now die from a diet-related disease.

"This pandemic of preventable disease now consumes three quarters of our exploding healthcare budgets.

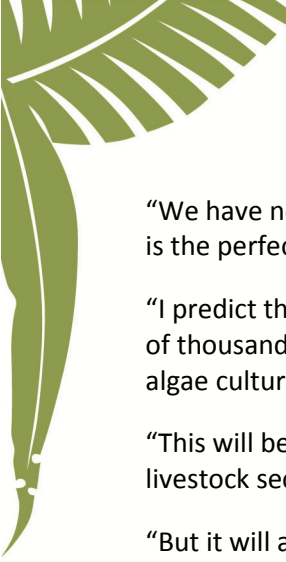
"So there are two major reasons to radically change the world diet – health and sustainability.

"The world horticultural industry will be at the forefront of that change," Mr Cribb says.

"There are huge opportunities for new foods, new production systems and novel diets which are healthier and more sustainable as well as delicious.

"Currently humanity consumes just a few hundred different plants: the modern diet is largely based on just five grains and five animals

"Yet there are 27,600 edible plants on Earth, mostly vegetables and most of them unknown to the majority of people.



“We have not yet begun to explore the horticultural, health and culinary potential of our home planet – and now is the perfect time to do so.

“I predict that over the coming two decades, this will lead to a major boom in horticulture, both in the cultivation of thousands of novel crops, in the development of new production systems such as aquaponics, biocultures and algae culture and green cities, and in the design of new foods and diets.

“This will be driven in part by climate change, which will make the production of grain-based agriculture and the livestock sectors that depend on it increasingly erratic, globally.

“But it will also be driven by a worldwide demand from consumers for lighter, fresher, healthier, more sustainable and more local foods.

“It is already clear from social media we are witnessing the start of a global revolt by consumers against the industrialised food system that is making them sick, and destroying farming communities and landscapes.

“Together these forces are poised to change the nature of food for all time – in favour of lighter, healthier more sustainable diets dominated by vegetables and fruits of astonishing diversity.

“Following the age of music and the age of computing, the world is now entering the Age of Food.

“Never has world cuisine been so spectacularly diverse – or so far short of its true potential.

“Food is one of the most creative acts which humans perform, and horticulturalists will be global leaders in that creativity.

“This isn’t just a matter of fashion. In a world of ten billion people, how intelligently we design our food will define the human future, now and for all time, for good or ill” he concluded.

International plenary speakers include:

- Em Prof Marc Van Montagu, World Food Prize Laureate (2013) and co-discoverer of the transformation technology used worldwide to produce genetically engineered plants.
- Dr Shenggen Fan, Director General of the leading food think-tank, International Food Policy Research Institute, who received the 2014 World Food Programme’s Hunger Hero Award.
- Dr Dyno Keatinge, Director General of the World Vegetable Centre and Chair of the Global Horticulture Initiative.
- Dr Dennis Gonsalves, former director of the USDA Pacific Basin Agricultural Research Center, who led the development of the virus-resistant transgenic papaya, saving the Hawaiian papaya industry.
- Malcolm Smith, the founding design director of the Integrated Urbanism Unit at Arup, London. The title of his keynote address is "Food forming places - horticulture and the contemporary city".
- Dr Martin Hamer, CEO, International Centre for Sustainable Development, Bonn-Rhein-Sieg University of Applied Sciences, who specialises in preventing transfer of pollutants into the food chain.

In addition to presentations on particular fruits, vegetables, nuts and berries, more general issues include:

- The place of horticulture in world food production
- Human health effects of fruits, vegetables, nuts and berries
- The future of indigenous vegetables and their role in the battle against malnutrition and disease
- Traditional and modern knowledge of medicinal and aromatic plants
- Functional & biofortified food and GMOs in horticulture
- Mechanisation, precision horticulture and robotics
- Connections between nature, plants, landscapes and human health

