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Australia recognises Thai agronomy professor for her outstanding contribution to international research

Australia-Thailand agricultural research cooperation has been further strengthened with Dr Benjavan Rerkasem, an outstanding agronomy professor from Chiang Mai University, recently receiving a recognition medal from Australia's Crawford Fund for her continued contribution to international agricultural research.

Professor Rerkasem was selected for the award for her leadership role in agricultural research and sustainable agriculture. Her advocacy and works cover a range of areas including: intellectual property rights and agricultural plant genetic resources; biotechnology and agriculture; and sustainability of agriculture in Asia. Professor Rerkasem is among the most cited scientists in Thailand in agricultural science. She is an alumna of the University of Western Australia, where she studied with an Australian Government Colombo Plan scholarship. In 2008 she was also presented with a distinguished international alumna award from the university.

Throughout her career, Professor Rerkasem has been called upon by agencies such as the Asian Development Bank and the Thailand Research Fund to assess research needs in south-east Asia. She has developed research programmes to address these issues with support from diverse donors including the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). A major legacy of Professor Rerkasem's contribution to agriculture in the region has been her training of post-graduate students.

The Crawford Fund is a non-profit organisation in Australia dedicated to raising awareness of the international agricultural research benefits to developing countries and to Australia. The Fund supports the work of ACIAR, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), and the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and other international research centres.

CRAWFORD FUND MEDAL CITATION:

Professor Benjavan Rerkasem, Chiang Mai University

Professor Rerkasem is held in high esteem for her leadership role in agriculture research and in sustainable agriculture. She has made an outstanding contribution to agricultural R&D and is among the most cited scientists in Thailand in agricultural science. She has held positions as Senior Research Fellow of the Thailand Research Fund and Distinguished Professor (Agronomy), at Chiang Mai University. Professor Rerkasem has been a member of the key bodies for plant nutrition such as the International Council on Plant Nutrition (from 1993).

Professor Rerkasem has made strong contributions to diverse areas of research, including:

- biological nitrogen fixation;
- boron nutrition and physiology
- genotypic variation in nutrient efficiency
- land use change in montane south-east Asia
- agricultural sustainability
- agricultural production and natural resources management in
- agricultural biodiversity in rice

Throughout her career she has been called upon by agencies like the Asian Development Bank and the Thailand Research Fund to assess research needs in south-east Asia and has developed research programme to address these issues with support from diverse donors including the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. Much of her research has involved international cooperation with a range of scientists in Asia, as well as Australia, Germany, and the USA. A major legacy of Professor Rerkasem's contribution to agriculture in the region has been her training of post-graduate students.

Professor Rerkasem was a key member of a team of researchers at Chiang Mai University who in the 1970's pioneered the development of agro-ecosystem analysis (AEA) in northern Thailand. AEA has been adopted in many parts of SE Asia as a participatory approach to documenting natural and agricultural resources and constraints to productive land use and management. This pioneering agricultural systems research anticipated the interest in agricultural sustainability which emerged as the paradigm for much agricultural R &D in the 1990's. Professor Rerkasem has also provided leadership in science policy through her publications and advocacy of: Intellectual property rights and agricultural plant genetic resources; Biotechnology and Agriculture; and Sustainability of Agriculture in Asia.