



Scholar Reflections from...

Western Australia



2019 Crawford Fund Annual Conference

Four West Australian scholars attended the 2019 Crawford Fund conference held in Canberra in August – one supported by our WA Committee, one supported by Curtin University and two supported by fabulous private donors.

Our competitive Conference **Scholarships** are offered to young people with a genuine interest in international agricultural research and development to attend the conference and participate in a special set of activities that we have developed since the program commenced in 2010.

Once again, we would like to thank our wonderful mentors, mentioned alongside the scholar they supported, who volunteer their time and offer valuable guidance, support and insights to the scholars throughout the conference.

WA COMMITTEE SPONSORED SCHOLAR

Wesley Moss, *University of Western Australia*

Mentor: Prof Lynette Abbott, Crawford Fund WA Committee

The 2019 Crawford Fund Conference did an amazing job of presenting the diverse and immense challenges facing the world, however the whole day still managed to resonant with a powerful sense of optimism. There were frequent mentions of Malthusian pessimism, but each speaker still delivered a message of hope. Yes, there are great challenges ahead for our planet, but we are capable of facing them. I left the conference feeling incredibly energized about my research in agriculture and excited to help meet the challenges of the future. To help weather the Perfect Storm by being part of a New Green Revolution.

The diverse range of presentations at the conference made it clear that there is no one solution to these problems, no “silver bullet” as Dr Mukherji put it. It was fantastic to hear about all of the different areas: from solar pumps, fish traps, cattle diets to vegetable gardens on Tuvalu. I definitely learnt a lot about completely new things and piqued my interest in a number of areas. In particular it was fascinating to hear about the number of issues we are now facing that are a direct result of the Green Revolution, highlighting the double-edged nature of all the progress we make.

Professor Godfrey’s morning keynote provided a fantastic introduction to the conference and Ms Baker’s afternoon keynote presented an intriguing perspective from the corporate side of the equation. It was a pity parliament was not sitting at the time, as the day highlighted the lack of policy leadership from our government, especially for a problem that requires such collaborative solutions.

The scholar days were a great addition to the conference and added immensely to the overall experience. Meeting the other scholars was a great opportunity to speak to people passionate about achieving the same goal but approaching it from completely different angles. The presentations opened my eyes to opportunities for research and international development I didn’t know existed.

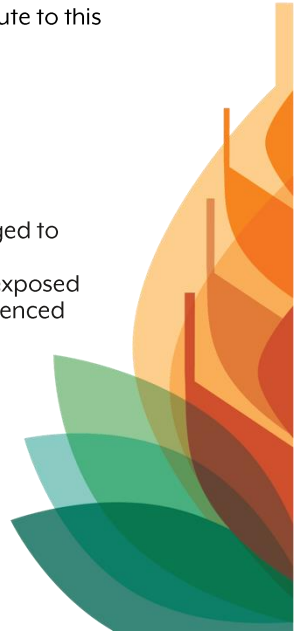
Overall it was a fantastic experience and I hope to be able to attend as a mentor in the future to contribute to this great event.

CURTIN UNIVERSITY SPONSORED SCHOLAR

Duncan Wells, *Curtin University*

Mentor: Gerard McEville, *Aik Saath Program Coordinator, ACIAR*

The Crawford Fund Conference was an extremely inspiring programme to attend, and I feel very privileged to have been given this special opportunity. I am forever grateful and must thank all who were involved in organising the event. The programme was well organised and extremely engaging, allowing me to be exposed to endless networking opportunities as well as being able to meet and listen to a diverse range of experienced professionals.





The first scholar day was a great success, I was able to meet with many like-minded scholars and mentors who all share an interest in achieving a reduced carbon emitting world, where agriculture is done sustainably and more efficiently. The evening address from Professor Ross Garnaut AC, was refreshing and very informative, summarising key aspects of where we sit globally in terms of addressing climate change. The need for global unity towards the matter was emphasised along with further commitment and investment required in scientific research to continue to assist in weathering the 'perfect storm'.

The Annual Parliament Conference was also a great success, with a series of well presented, diverse and informative talks relating to work that is being done in developing countries to help improve agricultural practice whilst significantly increasing efficiency. The spread of information and education is key to a global movement in sustainable agriculture, so it was great to meet research professionals who are on the ground and experiencing real life situations in developing nations. It is encouraging to see what great work is being done in a world where pessimism and negatively run large. The financial and liabilities address from Sarah Barker was also an extremely interesting perspective into how companies may be required to address climate change strategy into business modelling in the future.

The second day ended with a RAID networking event which was a lot of fun and gave us an opportunity to chat and network in a more casual scene which was the perfect end to a really beneficial day.

The final scholar day has filled my mind with many plans and ideas to try get involved in graduate or volunteer programs in developing nations. It was great to hear from people who had done significant work in similar such positions and how extremely full of life and energy they were. It was so encouraging to hear about all the work being done and how much of a positive impact it created in the local communities. I have left the Crawford programme a whole lot better off than when I arrived and would really recommend all my peers to apply for an opportunity next year.

PRIVATE DONOR SPONSORED SCHOLARS

Riley Faulds, *University of Western Australia*

Mentor – Jack Koci, *Sustainability Research Centre, University of the Sunshine Coast*

It's a pretty well-worn question in agriculture: 'In the coming decades, we'll need to feed billions more people, with less land and less water; how do we do that sustainably?' At the 2019 Crawford Fund Conference, we heard a number of potential answers to that question, from a number of the leaders of Australian and global efforts to feed the world sustainably. At the end of the Conference, I felt clarified, optimistic and impassioned about our odds of successfully addressing the **Nexus**, and about what roles I could play in Australia and internationally to contribute to the cause.

I've always been deeply interested in international relationships and how the international community function in meeting global challenges. For a while there, I aspired to be a diplomat, but found my way to agricultural science through a love for rural landscapes, biological systems and sustainability. This Conference has exposed me to a range of avenues for combining agricultural knowledge, passion for sustainability and an international focus. As soon as I met my mentor, Jack, at the first Scholar Day, I saw how comprehensive the range of opportunities for international research and development really is. Jack was a young man but had already travelled around South-East Asia with the ACIAR graduate program and worked to build networks with RAID, while fitting a PhD in there somewhere too!

From the first session of that day through to the final speeches of the third day, we heard from amazing researchers, policymakers and advocates, whose career paths had taken them from places very similar to where we Scholars found ourselves, to countries across Asia, Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. These were the directors of international research institutes, leaders of aid networks, and individual researchers conducting fascinating projects in incredible places and they were all encouraging, realistically optimistic and willing to share their thoughts and knowledge on a range of topics and issues. Hearing an impassioned, authoritative speech about water scarcity in India and then discussing novels with the same speaker in a relaxed networking afternoon tea was an incredibly valuable experience for a student like me. I saw that the people who were leading the national and global push for sustainability, productivity and equality were knowledgeable and passionate, but pretty normal as well.

It was particularly inspiring to observe how these 'normal people' had dedicated their lives to pursuing research and development to drive positive change for sustainability and food security. They are up against immense challenges, which they were necessarily blunt about, but never lost an overall attitude of optimism in approaching. Hearing about the huge potential for carbon sequestration in Mallee regions, for urban food production, for smallholder farmers to improve production sustainability, excited me immensely. And learning how I can contribute to these efforts into the future is something that I hadn't really experienced in this depth





before. My desire to pursue a career in agricultural research for a sustainable socio-productive future for Australia and the globe is stronger than ever.

Isabella Suleski, *University of Western Australia*

Mentor: Tamaya Peressini, *ACIAR*

The 2019 Crawford Fund Conference was the first conference I have had the opportunity to attend, and it was a truly incredible experience. I am very grateful and privileged to have been provided with the chance to participate in such an event, especially as a second-year undergraduate student with so much yet to learn.

“Weathering the ‘Perfect Storm’: Addressing the Agriculture, Energy, Water and Climate Change Nexus” was a very apt name for this year’s conference. Not only did it provide an exceptional insight into food and nutritional security measures being undertaken both within Australia and internationally, but highlighted the complex intersections between these key elements.

The morning of the conference was opened by keynote speaker Sir Charles Godfray, asking the pertinent question, “can we feed the world without wrecking the environment?” I found this session an extremely engaging and relevant way to begin, as with a keen interest in environmental conservation, it is a question I have often thought about. Sir Godfray explored this from a population biology perspective and called for a radical improvement of resource-use efficiency and sustainability. He admitted this to be ambitious, but thought it to be attainable, and his optimism and belief in causes for hope was a refreshing way to consider the future.

The conference speakers also provided numerous examples where measures undertaken in food and nutrition security have had positive impacts. Dr Ajay Mathur spoke of ways to increase and incentivise water use efficiency. One such intervention he described was energy-efficient solar pumps for irrigation in India. Whilst solar pumping in this manner is yet to be incorporated on a larger scale, it is still an innovative means to reduce over-pumping of water and has potential to be implemented in numerous areas within and outside of India. Professor Alice Joan G. Ferrer described the Climate Smart Village initiative, and how it motivates communities to take action towards food security and agricultural productivity, whilst adapting to climate change. Climate Smart Villages have already been pilot tested in countries throughout South East Asia. It was uplifting to hear about these resourceful and creative means benefitting communities whilst being ‘climate smart’.

To me, the insight provided by the conference was invaluable, giving me a clear idea of current and future areas of research that I could become involved with. Having Tamaya Peressini as my mentor to guide me through the conference proceedings and scholar activities further heightened the insight I was able to gain, as well as made the conference a very enjoyable experience overall! The networking opportunities and knowledge she provided was extremely beneficial, and as an ACIAR graduate she had a wealth of advice about where I could take my undergraduate degree in genetics.

Being a scholar, I met many other young people passionate about all the factors within the climate change nexus. It was amazing to meet so many like-minded people from such a broad range of backgrounds and have the opportunity to network not only with the experienced speakers and mentors, but these other scholars. The experience of these few days was compelling, mind-broadening, challenging and incredibly inspiring, and I would highly recommend it to everyone!

