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For a Food Secure World

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MEDIA RELEASE

FARMERS AND CONSUMERS NEED TO BE PULSE SMART

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Farmers, consumers and the planet would benefit by being more 'pulse smart'.

This is the message of Professor Chandra Madramootoo, a water and food security specialist who is the Chair of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), the lead international research agency focusing the world's attention on the nutritional and environmental benefits of little known 'pulses' during the UN's 2016 International Year of Pulses.

"Pulses are truly magic, offering a win-win-win situation for the farmer, the consumer and the planet, and this holds true in Australia and the developing world," said Professor Madramootoo, who is visiting Australia to meet with Australian officials and researchers.

"Parts of Australia have similar growing season conditions as the semi-arid tropics and Australia has developed considerable expertise in the production of drought tolerant pulses, with many varieties originating from ICRISAT's genebank. For example, Australian growers export chickpeas to India, given that India has a large demand for chickpeas but is not self sufficient," said Professor Madramootoo, who is James McGill Professor in the Department of Bioresource Engineering at McGill University, Canada.

"More linkages between ICRISAT and Australian producers, technologists and processors of pulses will help to advance the production, trade and consumption of pulse crops.

"This is very important given that pulses are multi-functional crops that are good for nutrition and soil productivity, and are dryland crops that do not need to be irrigated," said Professor Madramootoo, whose areas of expertise include water management, irrigation, drainage, agricultural research, and international agriculture development.

"The poor of the world have had little choice but to focus their diets on lentils, beans, pigeonpea and chickpea. But Australians should be aware that in addition to providing an opportunity to diversify their diets, pulses help address obesity and manage chronic diseases like diabetes and coronary conditions.

"Pulses are also highly water efficient, growing in drought-prone areas in many parts of Australia, and they help improve soil fertility by fixing nitrogen and promoting soil microbes. They also make a positive contribution in reducing the release of greenhouse gases," he said.

Professor Madramootoo explained the many positive outcomes in the developing world too.

"Pulses can better withstand climate change thus reducing risk for the smallholder farmer; they are used as food, fodder, fuel and as a building material so help improve livelihoods of farmers and are particularly important for female farmers who are a major part of the labour force in pulses."

The UN General Assembly declared 2016 as the International Year of Pulses (IYP) with the aim to heighten public awareness of the nutritional benefits of pulses as a part of sustainable food production aimed towards food security and nutrition.

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The Crawford Fund's mission is to increase Australia's engagement in international agricultural research, development and education for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.