



THE CRAWFORD FUND
For a Food Secure World

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MEDIA RELEASE

Media are welcome to attend

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CARING AND SHARING:

DATA SHARING – NOT JUST DATA HARVESTING – OFFERS MORE BENEFIT FOR FARMERS

Digital data collection should not just be data harvesting, it should be information sharing in real time back to farmers so they share the benefit.

This is the message by Stuart Higgins, speaking at *‘Transforming Lives and Livelihoods: The Digital Revolution in Agriculture’*, the 2017 Crawford Fund annual conference in Canberra on 08 August at Parliament House. The event will be opened by The Hon Barnaby Joyce, Deputy Prime Minister.

“Digital data collection doesn’t have to be just data harvesting, it can also be information sharing in real time back to farmers. Too often farmers miss out on the benefit from the research that others do with their involvement. I expect the call for this data sharing, rather than the more traditional one-way data flow, will increase as more farmers around the world are freely giving their time and their information to others.”

“Mobile Acquired Data (MAD), using apps on tablets to collect data in the field, is helping Australian researchers overseas to collect more meaningful data and adding real value for individual smallholder farmers involved,” said Mr Higgins, who sold his irrigated grain and cotton farm 10 years ago to focus on working with farmers around the world, after producing an award-winning radio program called [Grow Your Own](#) with ABC Radio National.

“We are helping creative researchers build their own apps using off the shelf technology to work with farmers in developing countries but they’re applicable anywhere in the world. Australian researchers, extension workers, private consultants and companies can also use this data collection technology for research to improve production, the environment, livelihoods and health,” said Mr Stuart Higgins, Director of AgImpact, the company commissioned to deliver the MAD research series for the Australian Centre for International Research (ACIAR).

MAD projects have been undertaken in Indonesia, Pakistan, Myanmar, Vietnam, Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea where field conditions are challenging and most of the population are smallholder farmers that underpin food security and economic stability in their countries.

“In several projects, farmers get information back in real time, and it’s specific to them and their circumstances. When feedback from research is delivered to farmers in this way, there’s a much greater chance of having an impact.”

Mr Higgins explained there are currently nine MAD projects involving Australian and international researchers using apps overseas funded as part of ACIAR’s research series.

“We have found the use of MAD technology improves relationships between researchers and smallholder farmers, while facilitating two-way information exchange in near real time, with survey times almost halved and 73% of farmers reporting a positive experience.

One project led by the University of Queensland, built an app for their work with beef producers in Vanuatu which provides data to farmers on the performance and market price of their cattle for each individual animal in real time. The app on a tablet is linked to a wireless portable printer in the field, allowing the farmer more information and more bargaining power on when and where to sell cattle.

“It empowers farmers to make better choices based on information fed back to them in near real time. The same data can also be used to inform Vanuatu’s future social and economic policy for the beef industry,” said Mr Higgins.

‘When I first started farming, I was full of enthusiasm but I had limited resources and very limited knowledge. I received incredible support from my community. My neighbours taught me so much. I’m fortunate now to work with initiatives that do exactly the same thing for neighbouring smallholder farmers in the region,’ said Mr Higgins.