MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: 9am AEDT 13 December 2021

Media are welcome to attend. Interviews can be prearranged for Mon, 13 or Tues, 14 December
All media releases will be available here and the full program is online.

AGRICULTURAL INFESTATIONS COSTING $300B A YEAR:
Urgent Need to Build Food System Resilience

COVID-19 should focus global and Australian attention on the nexus between food, health, trade and environment. Policy and management around biosecurity risks and rebuilding food system resilience need urgent assessment and action. Cross-sectoral collaboration across agriculture, trade, environment, and human health can help to minimize tradeoffs and enhance synergies in managing biosecurity risks.

These messages will drive the address by Professor Prabhu Pingali, Founding Director of the Tata-Cornell Institute for Agriculture and Nutrition and Chair of the Governing Board of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) to the 2021 Crawford Fund annual conference, titled *Food & Nutrition Security – The Biosecurity, Health, Trade Nexus.*

"Transboundary agricultural pest and disease infestations, triggered by the intensification and homogenization of crop and livestock production systems, have become preeminent global biosecurity risks over the past half century," said Professor Pingali who was formerly Deputy Director of the Agricultural Development Division of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

"The FAO estimates that on an annual basis, plant diseases cost the global economy around $220 billion and invasive insects at least $70 billion. The associated risks of hunger and food insecurity are borne disproportionately by the poor and marginalized populations across the developing world, many of whom live in the Australasian region," he said in his keynote address.

"Cross-sectoral collaboration across agriculture, trade, environment, and human health can help to minimize tradeoffs and enhance synergies in managing biosecurity risks and associated cross-sectoral impacts," he stressed.

"There is an urgent need to build food system resilience against biosecurity risks. Advances in genetic technologies for diagnostics and surveillance, in combination with supply chain traceability and AI and machine learning, could reduce biosecurity risks through early detection and control," he explained.

"COVID-19 has surely shown that even an island nation like Australia cannot avoid these threats, due to global interconnectedness through travel and trade having enhanced the speed and geographic reach of alien species movement and the intensity of the resulting damage caused to food systems."

"Climate change has further exacerbated the biosecurity risks associated with agricultural pests. As temperatures rise, pests commonly found in the tropics are migrating to more temperate climates. The positive yield benefits that these latitudes expect from rising temperatures will be tempered by the increased risk of losses from these pests."

"The rapid global spread of zoonotic diseases has become a major human health concern and a disruptor of food systems and rural livelihoods. COVID-19 has focused global attention on the nexus between food, health, and environment, as well as the need for promoting One Health policies and practices."

"The recent experience of COVID-19 has shown that global health systems are not resilient to zoonotic shocks even where the food systems themselves, like in Australia, have had minimal disruption," he said.

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