

OPENING ADDRESS

Celebrating agriculture for development

The Hon John Anderson AC

Chair, The Crawford Fund

The speakers and delegates at this conference acknowledge that it is being held on the traditional lands of the people of the Ngannawal nation. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



This year is special both for the Crawford Fund and for the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, ACIAR, in that we are both celebrating anniversaries – 35 years and 40 years, respectively.

Professor Derek Tribe (founder of the Crawford Fund) and Sir John Crawford (in whose name the Fund was established) both recognised the vital role that agricultural research and development (R&D) could play in supplying the world with food, having witnessed famines, widespread malnutrition and hunger, and the undeveloped state of many economies. Sir John Crawford was also the driving force behind the founding of ACIAR and, to a significant extent, the CGIAR. When the Crawford Fund began work in 1987, the ‘Green Revolution’ was well underway, driven by Norman Borlaug based at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center in Mexico (CIMMYT) for wheat and maize, and by M.S. Swaminathan at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines for the rice-dependent countries of South and East Asia. At that time, there was a growing awareness that agricultural R&D could also help lift people out of poverty and raise the GDP of the world’s poorest countries. Although the proportion of hungry people (about 1 in 9) has not changed significantly since 1987, agricultural production driven by R&D and other innovations has enabled us to feed approximately 3 billion more people. This is compelling evidence of the importance of the continuing success of many scientists and farmers in agricultural research.

In the 1980s, it was also recognised that improved and sustainable management of the natural resource base and environment that underpins agricultural production needed significantly more attention. That led to the formation of several more international centres with specific foci: for water, the International Water Management Institute (IWMI); for forestry and agroforestry, the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and the World Agroforestry Centre; for biodiversity, Bioversity International.

Similarly, the important roles of animal and fish protein in diets were recognised, resulting in the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), and WorldFish; for policy, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) was formed; the World Vegetable Center (WorldVeg) and the International Potato Center (CIP) were set up to work on vegetables and potatoes. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) was formed for R&D on so-called ‘poor people’s food’, and the International Center for Agricultural



John Anderson giving the opening address of the 2022 conference, in the Great Hall of Parliament House, Canberra.

Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) began working on food for dry areas. Australians have had pivotal roles on the boards or staff of these international organisations and others. Many of these centres have displays at this conference.

The Crawford Fund highly values its working relationship with ACIAR and the international centres, and with organisations such as the Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutes (which is also represented here today) and with the Australian universities and federal and state institutions involved in international agricultural research. We have always tried to take stock of the impact of our work which depends on collaboration with them and with universities and agriculture departments at home and abroad.

Our founding Director, Derek Tribe, coined the phrase ‘doing well by doing good’ to encapsulate the benefits arising from our investment in agricultural R&D. This year, we want to celebrate some of the positive outcomes arising from our 35 years of doing well by doing good, and from ACIAR’s 40 years. Consequently, the conference focuses on a range of good-news success stories.

These include the positive benefit–cost ratios arising both in recipient countries and, I stress, in Australia, from Australian and international investment in international agricultural research. The benefits span on-farm productivity and profitability, food and nutrition security, gender equity, environment and natural resources, capacity development, biosecurity and ‘soft power’ (a term used by diplomats) outcomes.

Over the last 12 months, the Crawford Fund has commissioned two major studies of the benefits arising from investment in international agricultural research – both the economic

benefits and other less tangible but equally important benefits. We will be releasing these two reports later this year. The results back up other international studies and make compelling reading. They include:

- up to 10-fold monetary returns on investment to farmers;
- significant numbers of individuals trained across diverse subject areas;
- improved nutrition and natural resource management practices;
- improved roles and outcomes for women; and
- the development of networks across countries that enhance our collective capacity to respond to threats and challenges.

Furthermore,

- Australia's investment in the international centres has given us access to new varieties and cultivars that have enabled our farmers to increase yields and remain internationally competitive!

These are all worth celebrating. They represent the collective work of ACIAR, the Crawford Fund and many individual researchers. Such achievements are often overlooked politically and by the general public, despite our best efforts to publicise 'good news stories'. Through this conference and the subsequent release of the reports and a planned series of activities, we hope to further rectify this.

Today's speakers are asked to look to the future, while recognising that we are in an era confronted by the 3 Cs – COVID-19, climate change and conflict.

From a political perspective, in these days of great self-doubt and loss of confidence in the west, it is all too easy to overlook the enormous strides that have been made. It seems vitally important, to me, to remember that the significant achievements in food security have been made possible by two major realities – realities that are too easily forgotten or misunderstood. The first has been what is known as the 'liberal global order' – the rules-based international system that has prevailed since the end of the Second World War which made it possible to mount the major international cooperation for food security, in which Australia has played such an honourable role. It hardly needs stating that there is now a genuine and frightening tussle for a new more autocratic global order, which seems, to me, to be threatening progress towards a fair and free world. Indeed, I am not certain what would happen to climate policy should the current global architecture be turned on its head.

The second great reality is that we have had an abundance of cheap energy, and the technologies and fertilisers that have accompanied that. The nexus between the production of ammonia, steel, concrete and cheap diesel and electricity on the one hand, and plentiful food on the other, is I fear very poorly understood, including by many policy makers.

The road to a lower emissions future is already involving difficult and contentious policy options that go to the very heart of global food production – think of Sri Lanka and the Netherlands. We should also note that serious geopolitical issues tend to take precedence over other significant issues – including food security and climate change. My point is that in

an environment where there is a very low level of understanding of the mechanics of feeding the world, it is vitally important that we avoid catastrophism as much as possible, in favour of cool calm reason soundly based on high quality science and research.

Agriculture and agricultural research, when understood properly, are already part of the solution, and outstanding organisations like the Crawford Fund and ACIAR play significant roles. More can be done if there is greater support, as today's speakers will no doubt reinforce.

John Anderson has been a long-serving member of the Board of the Crawford Fund, and has been Chair of the Board since 2017. He was recently appointed companion of the order of Australia (AC) in the Queen's Birthday 2022 Honours List for eminent service to rural and regional development, to leadership in international agricultural research and food security, to social commentary, and through contributions to not-for-profit organisations. John Anderson is the former Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the National Party of Australia (1999–2005); Minister for Primary Industries and Energy (1996–1998); Minister for Transport and Regional Development (1998–2005); and served on the Expenditure Review (Budget) Committee, National Security Committee and Standing Environment Committee while in Cabinet. He was the member for Gwydir, New South Wales, from 1989 to his retirement in 2005. John has returned to farming, and is also active in the not-for-profit sector.