

MEDIA RELEASE

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AGRICULTURAL R&D A MAJOR DRIVER OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Agricultural productivity, and the R&D that underpins it, is a major driver of social change. For developing countries rapid increases in agricultural productivity are key to accelerating development. For developed countries, R&D reduces risk and improves incomes for farmers and the broader community, and in protecting and restoring the environment. These benefits should motivate investment.

This is the key message of renowned economist Dr Jenny Gordon, Member of the Australian International Agricultural Research Centre's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisory Panel, and the Asian Development Bank Institute's Advisory Committee. Dr Gordon will address the Crawford Fund's international conference *Celebrating Agriculture for Development – Outcomes, Impacts and the Way Ahead* being held on 15-16 August in Parliament House, Canberra. The conference will also be addressed by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon Murray Watt.

"Agricultural R&D and the resulting growth in productivity has been a primary driver and enabler of social change through urbanisation, investment in people and ideas, and prosperity," said Dr Gordon, who was formerly the Chief Economist at DFAT.

"Publicly funded agricultural R&D is increasingly focused on delivering social benefits by supporting more sustainable and equitable development in low-income countries, finding solutions to environment problems, and engaging with First Nations peoples to learn from and support their land and water management practices," she said.

"It's good to see that agricultural R&D is further widening its frame to support important social outcomes including improving equity for women and ethnic minorities, developing more diverse and resilient production systems that benefit the natural environment, improving nutrition and reducing income instability for the rural poor, as well as freeing up children to be able to engage in education."

"Governments would do well to support agricultural research for a whole range of related social benefits. While many of the social spillovers are difficult to quantify, that makes them no less valuable or reduce the motivation for the investment," she concluded.

The Fund's 2022 annual conference brings together international and Australian specialists to look at the mutual benefit and impacts of investment in global food security and poverty alleviation and consider the effects of emerging threats including climate change and changing geo-political conditions on agricultural production, food chains and the environment.

Other speakers include international affairs specialist Allan Gyngell, climate change and security specialist Dr Robert Glasser and renowned global wheat scientist Dr Alison Bentley.

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