

MEDIA RELEASE

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FUTURE FOCUS ON INNOVATION FOR 'RESPONSIBLE' AGRICULTURE

The agrifood sector is at an inflection point influenced by climate change, natural disasters, consumer trends, digital disruption, population growth, pandemics, changing geopolitical dynamics and biosecurity issues. The coming years will see a significant change in the way we grow, produce, harvest, distribute and consume food and fibre, and we should focus on 'responsible' agriculture.

This is the key message of renowned agricultural innovator and science leader Professor Neena Mitter, Director of the Australian Research Council Industrial Transformational Research Hub for Sustainable Crop Protection at The University of Queensland. She will be discussing innovative, ground-breaking platform technologies as the future of agriculture in her address to the Crawford Fund's international conference *Celebrating Agriculture for Development – Outcomes, Impacts and the Way Ahead* 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.

"Managing pests and diseases and safeguarding our agricultural sector from biosecurity risks is a key cog in the agrifood supply chain. Transformative change in pest and disease management is required worldwide, with a focus on 'responsible' agriculture for the health of the planet and of the future consumer, as well as global food and nutritional security," said Professor Mitter.

"I strongly believe that when you solve a problem which enough people care about and add the spice of innovation, the world will be at your door. These extraordinary times need extraordinary leadership, both in science and management," she said.

"One example is chemical pesticides which suffer from issues such as residual toxicity, run-off, pest specificity and resistance. The European Green Deal has proposed to reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50% by 2030. What is needed in innovation in ag-tech that can deliver sustainable alternatives to chemical-based fungicides, while maintaining crop production."

Professor Mitter explained her work on **BioClay**,[™] a next generation RNA based crop protection platform as a transformational non-GM, residue free, specific, and environmentally sustainable alternative to chemical pesticides. RNA based biopesticides are gaining momentum across the globe.

"We need more innovations that give us clean, green produce for domestic consumption and exports and preparedness for biosecurity threats," she concluded.

The Fund's 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 geopolitical 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.

