

MEDIA RELEASE

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GETTING AGRICULTURE 'BACK TO BASICS' IN A RISKIER WORLD

Australia's wealth of indigenous crops and broad experience in building world-leading agricultural industries, despite poor soils and a challenging climate, mean it has much to offer the world in the quest to adapt agriculture to climate change. The US Special Envoy for Food Security brings a message of 'getting back to the basics' to strengthen the resilience of agriculture and believes Australia has a lot to offer the world.

Dr Cary Fowler is perhaps best known as the “father” of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault, which provides the ultimate security for more than 1 million unique crop varieties in the frozen ground of the Arctic. He is keynoting Australia's key food security, **The Crawford Fund's** annual conference - *Global Food Security in a Riskier World*, being held in Canberra, 4-5 September. The Fund's annual conference will bring together international and Australian specialists to address the grand challenge presented by the need to produce more nutritious food, sustainably, in a riskier and more uncertain world.

“We are in the midst of a global food crisis. More than 700 million people were undernourished in 2022 compared to 613 million in 2019. It's an incomprehensibly large number and a human tragedy. Every country is affected, including countries like Australia but especially the most vulnerable around the world,” said Dr Fowler, who was chosen in 2022 to serve as the Special Envoy for Global Food Security.

“We have conflicts, climate change, disruptions to the global food supply chain due to covid,” said Dr. Fowler, “and global food demand will increase by more than 50 percent in 2050 as the global population grows to 10 billion people. At the same time, in the absence of adaptation, climate change is expected to reduce crop yields. This dangerous combination is already causing price spikes and food insecurity, leading to, and being further exacerbated by social unrest, political tensions, and conflict.”

“As efficient Australian farmers know, we have many of the solutions for difficult times. However, it is essential that we get back to the basics, to foster more resilient food systems. Agricultural research and development need to be prioritized. We need to create a solid foundation for crop productivity by investing in the fundamentals both above and below ground: above ground by developing more resilient crop varieties and below ground by building and conserving healthy soils,” said Dr Fowler.

“Wealthy countries like Australia, with access to the latest technologies and a robust R&D sector, can play an important role in addressing global food insecurity, and we welcome Australian collaboration.”

“We must ask what have we learned in recent years about the causes of food insecurity? What factors did we previously overlook or underappreciate? What changes in strategy are indicated from the lessons we have learned?”

“Few Australian farmers and agri-business people would argue that fertile, healthy soils and adapted crops are not prerequisites for food security. The U.S. has launched the **Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils**, in partnership with the African Union and FAO. We want others to join us to improve soil management and surge the improvement and adaptation of highly nutritious traditional and indigenous crops.”

“This approach - getting back to the soil and ‘orphan’ or traditional crops, will improve nutrition, especially for women and children, and help existing food systems be more resilient to shocks of all sorts,” he concluded.

Other speakers include **Em Prof Kym Anderson AC**, renowned trade economist and winner of the Crawford Fund medal, **Professor Wendy Umberger**, CEO, The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research; **Ben Fargher**, Environmental Markets Lead, Cargill Asia Pacific, and **Dr Warren T K Lee**, Senior Nutrition & Food Systems Officer, UN FAO.

