Contact for enquiries:
Cathy Reade – Director of Outreach
+61 413 575 934
cathy.reade@crawfordfund.org
www.crawfordfund.org
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MEDIA RELEASE

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NEGLECTED AND UNDERUTILISED CROPS TO FILL SUPPLY AND NUTRITION GAPS

An urgent call is gathering momentum to raise awareness of the benefits of nutritionally-dense and climate-resilient crop species that are largely neglected and underutilised, but are very 'smart'.

Neglected and underutilised plant species, or 'smart foods', offer solutions to chronic hunger and malnutrition and can introduce diverse, sustainable and climate resilient options into food production systems around the world. So why aren't we including them in our diets and agricultural systems?

Professor Kadambot Siddique, The University of Western (UWA) Australia Hackett Professor of Agriculture Chair and Director of The UWA Institute of Agriculture is a world leading researcher on these crops and will present on what they offer at the Crawford Fund's international conference - Australia's key food security event - *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.

"Asia and the Pacific continue to suffer from a high prevalence of malnutrition. An estimated 479 million undernourished people, 58% of the worldwide total, live in this region.

Prof Siddique noted that 2023 is the **UN International Year of Millets** and along with *The Future Smart Food Initiative* also being led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, is offering an opportunity to promote the enormous benefits that millets and other neglected or underutilised crop species offer in the fight against hunger and malnutrition.

"It's time for an Australian and international effort to raise awareness of the benefits of diversifying our agricultural systems to incorporate a wider range of nutritious and resilient crop species."

"We have these lesser-known crops that can help us address food security, climate change and malnutrition. But not enough is done to promote them and introduce or re-introduce them to where they are so needed."

"More than 150 species have been identified as neglected or underutilised, with 38 now classified as Future Smart Foods because they offer nutrient-dense, climate-resilient, profitable, adaptable, and locally available dietary options. They could also be profitable, adaptable, and locally accessible if governments provide the focus, education and incentives to spread their production and consumption."

"Having 'trendy' foods on the shelves in capital cities is great, but what about remote regions in Australia or for our poorer neighbours where undernourishment, stunting and food insecurity are prevalent," he said.

"The current agricultural production system focuses on just three staple crops – rice, maize and wheat - which provide about 60 per cent of the world's food energy intake," explained Prof Siddique.

"Australians will have heard of quinoa, chia and lentils - but what about foxtail millet, drumstick, elephant foot yam, amarantus and taro," said Prof Siddique.

"They are such a win-win-win for the farmer especially the small holder farmers of Asia and Africa, the consumer and the economy," he concluded.