

SESSION 5: CONVERSATION ON RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Chair: Professor Wendy Umberger
Chief Executive Officer ACIAR



Panel

Professor Glenn Denning, Professor of Professional Practice, Columbia University

Ms Caitlin McConnel, Australian Farmer & Lawyer

Dr Purnima Menon, Senior Director, Food and Nutrition Policy and Acting Senior Director, Transformation Strategies, IFPRI

Dr Aditi Mukherji, Principal Scientist – Climate Action in the Livestock, Climate and Environment Program of ILRI

Adjunct Associate Professor Seesei Molimau-Samasoni, Bioeconomy Science Institute New Zealand

Chair:

Welcome back, everyone. We'll now move into our late afternoon Q&A and panel discussion. Thank you to our panellists for joining. Let's start with some reflections from today.

What were the big ideas or common themes you heard today?

Associate Professor Seesei Molimau-Samasoni:

I wasn't originally on the program—I was asked to step in for our Pacific colleague. I've just transitioned from 17 years at the Scientific Research Organisation of Samoa to the International Development Unit at New Zealand's new Bioeconomy Science Institute. The Crawford Fund for Food Security keeps inviting me back, even though I tend to stir the

pot. My main lesson is this: disruption can be positive. Listening is critical—listening to farmers, to men and women, across the value chain. That message has come through strongly today.

Dr Aditi Mukherji:

Glenn’s opening struck me: *universal food security is possible if we get our house in order*. Caitlin’s remarks on the rule of law and legal instruments for climate action were also a major takeaway.

Associate Professor Seeseei Molimau-Samasoni:

Many climate challenges cut across regions, yet some are localised. In the Pacific, countries with the lowest emissions face the harshest impacts. This raises serious questions about fairness and adaptation versus mitigation.

Dr Purnima Menon:

I sensed urgency, but also concern. Climate change, food security, and gender equity often fall off political agendas. The challenge ahead is keeping these issues visible for policymakers—because if they’re not on the agenda, solutions won’t be financed.

Ms Caitlin McConnel:

From my perspective as both a farmer and legal advisor, we already have abundant research and adaptation strategies. What’s missing is recognition of *why* we’re here: the bigger picture of food security, law, and responsibility.

Professor Glenn Denning:

I’d highlight three themes:

1. Food security and complacency – still not fully understood domestically or internationally.
2. Partnerships – we all say they matter, but we need skills and mechanisms to make them real.
3. Career opportunities – the next generation sees how exciting and important this sector is.

Chair:

How do we balance food security with emissions reduction and sustainability?

Dr Aditi Mukherji:

We must act on both simultaneously. If today’s solutions undermine food security in five years, we’ve failed. Bhutan’s *Gross National Happiness* model shows how policy can integrate broader well-being into decision-making.

Dr Purnima Menon:

We avoid “tinkering at the edges.” We must address corporate accountability in food systems—major players driving plastic waste, unhealthy products, and supply chain issues. The conversation can’t only be about consumers and smallholders.

Ms Caitlin McConnel:

Agriculture will always have emissions. My cattle will always emit methane. The issue is proportionality and fairness. Litigation and the rule of law can drive accountability across the supply chain, just as food safety lawsuits transformed systems in the 1990s.

Associate Professor Seeseei Molimau-Samasoni:

Sometimes the simplest perspective matters: growing our own food. In the Pacific, we once

sustained ourselves with minimal externalities. Courageous leaders must revisit values and make tough, transparent decisions.

Professor Glenn Denning:

Universal food security should be our guiding light. Trade-offs happen at every level—global to local—but leadership is essential to ensure decisions respect both present and future generations.

Audience – Eric Huttner ACIAR:

How can we harness traditional knowledge as an enabler of transformation, not a barrier?

Dr Aditi Mukherji:

Traditional practices like water harvesting or fire management hold lessons. The challenge is adapting them to modern contexts, but they remain valuable starting points.

Ms Caitlin McConnel:

We must engage landholders and traditional custodians where they are, not pull them into boardrooms. My father's experience with dual-axis solar trackers showed how on-the-ground wisdom often outpaces engineers and models. Listening is vital.

Audience -Maximus, University of Sydney:

Agriculture isn't always seen as attractive. How can we make it "sexy" again, especially for young people?

Ms Caitlin McConnel:

Agriculture *is* sexy. I returned to farming despite being discouraged. Youth are increasingly choosing agriculture for its societal value, not just financial gain.

Dr Purnima Menon:

Consumers are passionate about food, and food connects directly to sustainability. Engaging youth around food systems—where food comes from, how it's produced—creates natural interest.

Associate Professor Seesei Molimau-Samasoni:

In the Pacific, many parents discourage farming as unsustainable. We're working to reframe agriculture as an opportunity for youth, both on-farm and in science.

Dr Aditi Mukherji:

The nexus of education, health, and agriculture policies is key. Agriculture must be integrated into school curricula and seen as a modern, innovative career path.

Chair:

Today's discussion reinforced themes of leadership, listening, partnerships, and urgency. Agriculture is at the heart of food security, climate action, and sustainable development. Thank you to our panelists and audience for such a rich and thoughtful dialogue.