

WORLD FOOD SECURITY: CAN PRIVATE SECTOR R&D FEED THE POOR?

ANNUAL CONFERENCE MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: 27 October 2009

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PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS IN R&D CAN BENEFIT POOR

Public-private partnerships can play a major role in R&D and the development of agricultural markets ranging from emerging seed markets in African countries to markets for financial products such as agricultural insurance.

This was the message given by Dr Marco Ferroni, an expert in international agriculture and sustainability issues and Executive Director of the non-profit Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture. He was speaking at the 2009 Crawford Fund International Conference "World Food Security: Can Private Sector R&D Feed the Poor?" in Parliament House, Canberra on 27-28 October.

Speakers including senior Federal politicians, senior representatives from The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, The UN World Food Program, A Green Revolution in Africa, and Monsanto, addressed the intersecting roles of the private, not for profit and public sectors in global food security and how to get the private sector better engaged for the benefit of the rural poor.

In welcoming delegates to the event, The Hon Neil Andrew AO, chairman of the Crawford Fund, noted that while some technologies, such as the mobile phone, flourish in the developing world, desperately needed agricultural technologies don't find their way to the countries that need them.

"While this is an issue giving rise to considerable controversy, especially questions such as intellectual property rights, multinational profits, the development of GMO's for the developing world and biopiracy, the private sector can and does provide much-needed R&D," he said.

Dr Ferroni highlighted the plight of small farmers who produce most of the food consumed in developing countries. His address noted examples from the Foundation's work with smallholder farmers in Africa, South and East Asia, and Latin America, often in semi-arid areas similar to Australian conditions.

Mr Ferroni also explained the work of the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture in providing education and training, bringing to smallholder farmers the methods, knowledge and skills they need to improve what they grow in their fields.

"Neither the public nor the private sector appears equipped to adequately fill the R&D gap that limits the production possibilities of resource-poor small farmers in developing and emerging countries," said Dr Ferroni.

"While public investment in R&D has tended to stagnate or decline in many countries during the last two decades, the private sector has stepped up spending and deepened its presence in agriculture where there are market-friendly policies, infrastructure improvements and restructured governmental functions that may have crowded out the private sector in the past."

Dr Ferroni's presentation assessed the extent to which the fruits of private R&D are reaching small farmers, particularly in Africa and South Asia and discussed the role of donors, NGOs and foundations in fostering market growth and bringing technology to small farms in cooperation with the private sector.

"Like farmers everywhere, poor farmers are looking for technology and services to improve their productivity," Dr Ferroni reported. He believes both the public and the private sector are needed to

empower growers, raise farm productivity in environmentally sensible ways and get agriculture moving.

“The public sector must provide ‘public goods’ such as basic infrastructure, supportive policies, open markets and agricultural research. The private sector’s role is to add value at different points in the value chain, for example, by investing in the development of products and providing knowledge to farmers along with seed and crop protection products, fertilizer and so on.

“In the view of the Foundation, agriculture extension should be a primary link in improving sustainable agricultural practices in rural communities.”

“Millions of smallholder farmers in the developing world do not have sufficient access or the knowledge to use the scientific advances and public goods that can help increase agricultural productivity and improve their livelihoods. The Foundation aims to extend science-based know-how to them, facilitate access to quality inputs and link them to markets in profitable ways.”

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Speakers at this year’s Crawford Fund annual event include:

- *The Hon Stephen Smith MP, Minister for Foreign Affairs opening the event;*
- *The Hon Bob McMullan MP, Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance making the inaugural Sir John Crawford Memorial Address;*
- *Ms Josette Shareen, Executive Director of the World Food Program;*
- *Dr Prabhu Pingali of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation;*
- *Dr Marco Ferroni, Executive Director of the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture;*
- *Dr Namanga Ngongi , President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa;*
- *Ms Janice Armstrong from Monsanto Company*
- *Professor Philip Pardey, an internationally renowned Australian agricultural economist*
- *Leaders from a range of public good international and Australian agricultural research centres*

Further press materials, the program and other background is available at <http://www.crawfordfund.org/events/conference09.htm> or by contacting Cathy Reade, 0413575934

The Crawford Fund's mission is to increase Australia's engagement in international agricultural research, development and education for the benefit of developing countries and Australia.

*The Crawford Fund wishes to thank its supporters for the event including:
AusAID; Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research; Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; AVRDC; Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; CIMMYT; CSIRO Livestock Industries; Grains Research and Development Corporation; IFDC; Industrial Research Limited; ICRISAT; Monsanto; Pioneer Hi-Bred, A DuPont Business; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation; Syngenta Crop Protection, and Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture*