RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS MANAGE FOOD SECURITY COMPLEXITIES

The food crisis is seemingly on everyone’s lips these days and has prompted a flurry of commentary in national and international media pushing explanations ranging from global warming through to international trade policies, the emergence of biofuels, increasing urbanisation and population growth (see page 4).

The strain on food production and food supplies is the culmination of numerous and complex factors—environmental, social and political. The first communities to suffer are those in developing countries where the link between enough food and farming is most direct. For the majority of the world’s people there is no vast retail and food-manufacturing infrastructure buffering them from agricultural constraints.

These constrictions pose challenges that test the limits of agricultural knowledge and science, and they pose challenges that also continue to present researchers and policy-makers with shifting targets as overarching factors bear down—in particular climate change and the capacity of pests and diseases to evolve their way past previously built defences.

The spectre of global food shortages looming closer and larger with each passing season. The pressure on agriculture is immense and it is at the ground level of agricultural production that ACIAR’s research management performs a critical role.

For a comparatively small organisation, ACIAR’s reach and impact is deep and wide. This is because it has established over almost three decades a highly successful model for supporting international agricultural research. For most in the developed world, food security is a recent worry, but it has been ACIAR’s focus since its inception.

ACIAR is a facilitator. It creates research partnerships that apply the best possible skill-sets to each challenge at hand, and in a manner that leaves a legacy of increased local capacity within the communities involved. ACIAR’s work is shown to bring high rates of return to developing countries, in part because of its investment in capacity building (see page 24).

This capacity building extends beyond the nuts and bolts of agricultural research. It embodies a systems approach that reinforces changes, such as modified cropping or livestock activities, with specialist support for associated policy development and trade reform at government level.

A prime example of this is ACIAR’s role in the Smallholder Agribusiness Development Initiative in Indonesia—an extensive collaboration between a wide spread of research providers and commercial businesses (see page 8). It is driving a new ‘market pull’ approach to agricultural development among poor rural communities by establishing mutually supportive relationships between farmer groups and their produce buyers. The changes needed to create more sustainable and productive farms are given a direct commercial value, which is proving to be a strong stimulus for farmer adoption of research.

The initiative exemplifies ACIAR’s experience in leveraging research and funding relationships to maximise the outcomes and benefits. The program is funded by AusAID, with ACIAR drawing together strategic partnerships among research providers, farmer groups and private companies like the global confectionary and pet food corporation Mars, Incorporated.

As president director of Mars Symbioscience Indonesia, Noel Janetski, says in this issue’s report on the program, ACIAR brings to projects the required technical capabilities and also enormous credibility—crucial ingredients that make an often eclectic mix of stakeholders willing to work together to achieve what the world so desperately needs—sustainable, resilient and productive farming systems.
Features

Seeking answers to the food crisis
Julian Cribb, author of a forthcoming book on the global food security crisis, examines the main driving factors and ACIAR’s response to them

Farmers grasp the business of change
An Australia–Indonesia program is linking research agencies, extension service providers and private companies in a market-driven collaboration to reduce rural poverty

Annual Crawford conference sounds food security alarm
ACIAR has been called on to join global efforts to stem climate change threats to the world’s food production

Dry fallow rice paddies make beds of opportunity
The farming potential of Bangladesh’s rice paddies during the dry, fallow season is being tapped to grow wheat and chickpeas and raise the prosperity of poor farmers

Food security the key, not self-sufficiency
A project investigating the impact of China’s accession to the World Trade Organization on Chinese agriculture reveals the long-term economic pitfalls of food self-sufficiency policies

Flower power begins to bloom in the Pacific
ACIAR scoping studies in the Pacific show that local markets hold the best growth potential for high-value horticultural crops such as cut flowers and vegetables

India’s ‘fish-out-of-groundwater’ story
India’s saline-affected crop plots are being transformed into small inland seas to create new aquaculture opportunities for local farmers

Agricultural research earns high rates of return on investment
Independent assessments of ACIAR’s specialist agricultural R&D solutions show they are delivering significant measurable impacts in the developing world

ACIAR roundup
Foreign Minister visits ICRISAT
McMullan in Papua New Guinea
New work in Iraq
Report from food crisis task force
Project leaders win World Bank grant

TRAINING
John Allwright Fellows visit ACIAR
Cocoa partner to study research adoption
Latest Fellows announced
John Dillon Memorial Fellowships
First John Fryer Scholarships announced
Aquaculture course hatches its 100th graduate
Forestry intern at ACIAR

ACIAR what’s new
New appointments
New publications
New projects