ACIAR TO BOOST FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

Australia is making a major contribution to improve food security in eastern and southern Africa through a new A$20 million agricultural R&D program to substantially boost production of maize and legumes, and improve market opportunities for farmers. The project was officially announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith.

The maize-legume food security program will operate in five countries—Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania—with the benefits planned to spill over into other countries in eastern and southern Africa.

Food security is a major concern in this region, where more than half the population of 400 million people live in extreme poverty and about 70% depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Maize is the staple food crop in the region and legumes provide a valuable source of dietary protein.

Demand for maize and legumes is projected to increase substantially over coming years, but production is being held back by rainfall variability and weaknesses in crop management, varieties and value chains.

To overcome these constraints, a collaborative research program has been established between ACIAR, the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and national agricultural research systems in each of the five partner countries.

By involving farmers, extension agencies, non-government organisations and agribusinesses, the R&D program aims to lift crop productivity by 30% and also reduce year-to-year yield variation by 30% on about 500,000 farms within 10 years.

The production gains will be made through: testing and introducing conservation agriculture techniques to retain soil moisture; developing drought and disease-tolerant maize and legume varieties; optimising the use of farmer resources; and identifying better input supply and marketing options for smallholders.

The Australian Government has announced support for a $1.1 million ACIAR research project to assist small-scale cattle producers to improve their access to markets and to increase the availability of beef as a protein source in Botswana.

The smallholder cattle farmers, who produce 80–90% of beef in Botswana, operate in similar environments to cattle producers in dry areas of northern Australia.

A team from Botswana will visit Australia to assist in the design of the project, involving the Australian Beef Cooperative Research Centre, the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), and the Agricultural Research Council of the Republic of South Africa.

CIMMYT Board of Trustees visit

The Board of Trustees of the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) visited Australia in April, the first time the Board has done so. The visit provided an opportunity for CIMMYT to meet with Australia’s farming, research and international development communities.

Included in the round of discussions was a joint ACIAR–CIMMYT Food Security Roundtable, bringing together key stakeholders in Australia including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, AusAID and CSIRO, together with the Grains Research and Development Corporation, the Crawford Fund, the Natural Resources Commission of NSW, the University of Adelaide and Nuffield Australia.

The Roundtable was opened by Australia’s Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan.

A range of issues confronting agricultural research and threatening food security were

Presidential visit to ACIAR

ACIAR hosted the President of the Republic of Botswana, His Excellency Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, on 2 March 2010. The delegation met with ACIAR chief executive officer Dr Nick Austin and key ACIAR research program managers to discuss ACIAR’s expanding engagement with Africa.

ACIAR has supported agricultural research projects assisting disadvantaged and emerging farmers in southern Africa since 1983. This engagement is set to grow through the Australian Government’s ‘Food Security through Rural Development’ initiative.

The President of Botswana, Ian Khama (right) is welcomed to ACIAR by Nick Austin, CEO.
discussed during the Roundtable, including climate change, declining yields and ways to improve collaboration between research organisations around the world.

The Board of Trustees, chaired by Dr Julio Antonio Berdegué, believes that CIMMYT is well placed to meet these challenges.

Dr Berdegué says that the recent global food crisis has led to a reorganisation of the international agricultural research system under the World Bank. But over and above those reforms, CIMMYT is rolling out its own agenda, an ambitious program to double wheat and maize productivity by 2050.

“Gains in productivity of wheat are declining around the world, including in Australia,” Dr Berdegué says. “We are building international consortia that include Australian scientists and investors to look at how we can break the wheat yield barriers. That is something that is already underway.”

New CEO visits ACIAR partners

The importance of Australia’s agricultural research program was highlighted during a series of recent visits by ACIAR’s chief executive officer Dr Nick Austin to Indonesia, Solomon Islands and the Mekong region.

In Jakarta, Dr Austin met with the Minister for Agriculture, H. Suswono, senior staff at agricultural research agencies and Australia’s Ambassador to Indonesia, Bill Farmer. He also visited the Center for International Forestry Research, Bogor Agricultural University and ACIAR projects in Lombok.

The current program, with a budget of A$11.7 million, supports 59 projects in 11 provinces in eastern Indonesia and in parts of Java and Sumatra.

“The ACIAR research program aims to help boost farmers’ incomes in two ways: by increasing the productivity of crops, livestock and aquaculture; and by fostering the development of integrated agribusinesses, focusing on high-value commodities for which there is strong market demand,” Dr Austin said.

Dr Austin also travelled to Solomon Islands where he met with senior government stakeholders and visited a forestry project with ACIAR’s research program manager for forestry Dr Russell Haines.

During his visit to the Mekong region Dr Austin travelled to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand, meeting with senior government officials, which also will help identify opportunities for collaborative research on regional issues.

Dr Austin met with representatives from each country’s ministry of agriculture, along with specialist agencies active in the region, including the Asian Development Bank, the Mekong River Commission and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture.

These discussions focused on broad directions for cooperation in research and development, and specific areas where ACIAR may assist in the future. Dr Austin said the meetings allowed a first-hand understanding of the country’s agricultural research and development framework, policy, directions and priorities.

Dr Austin said such trips are “a valuable opportunity to learn more about the agricultural priorities of partner countries, and to promote Australia’s commitment to ensuring food security in the Asia–Pacific region”.

John Dillon Fellows visit

Nine up-and-coming leaders from agricultural organisations in the Asia–Pacific region met with Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance, Bob McMullan, on 16 March 2010.

The leaders are recipients of the 2010 John Dillon Memorial Fellowship Awards, provided by ACIAR for short-term leadership development opportunities and to encourage collaboration with Australians working in similar fields.

The scheme is named in recognition of the late Professor John Dillon, who was one of Australia’s leading agricultural economists and a strong advocate of international agricultural research and collaboration.

The Fellows—from Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Laos—are making important contributions to agricultural development in their countries. They are associated with ACIAR projects in the fields of horticulture, aquaculture, forestry, animal health and transferring research outcomes to farmers.

Mr McMullan told the Fellows that it is an important time for agricultural research and development so that sufficient food can be provided to people at reasonable prices, particularly with the focus on achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

The Fellows’ 6-week visit to Australia includes management training at Mt Eliza Business School and programs specially tailored to their management training needs. They have placements with various Australian R&D organisations in Hobart, Melbourne, Geelong, Canberra, Sydney, Armidale, Port Stephens, Brisbane, Sunshine Coast, Townsville and Cairns.

2010 JOHN DILLON FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS:

Ms Josefina Atienza – Science Research Specialist, Philippine Council for Agriculture, Forestry and Natural Resources Research and Development, Los Banos, PHILIPPINES

Dr Joko Pitono – Head of Planning and Evaluation Division, Indonesian Centre for Agricultural Technology Assessment and Development, Bogor, INDONESIA

Dr Muhammad Taufiq Ratule – Director, Assessment Institute of Agricultural Technology of Southeast Sulawesi, INDONESIA

Dr Le Anh Tuan – Head of Department of Fish Nutrition and Feeds, Nha Trang University, Nha Trang, VIETNAM

Mr Jacob Wani – Manager for Aquaculture and Inland Fisheries, National Fisheries Authority, Port Moresby, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Dr Nguyen Huu Van – Head of Department of Animal Husbandry, Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry, VIETNAM

Dr Khampmouht Vongxay – National Animal Health Centre, Department of Livestock and Fisheries Vientiane, LAO PDR
**Youth Ambassadors to carry the flag**

Four Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYADs) left Australia in April 2010 to spend up to 12 months working on ACIAR projects.

They are part of a contingent of 141 AYADs who are travelling to various countries in Asia, the Pacific and, for the first time, Africa.

**Dr Latsamy Boupha** – Vice Dean of Faculty of Forestry, National University of Laos, Vientiane, LAO PDR

**Mr Ioan Viji** – Principal Forest Officer, Department of Forests, VANUATU.

**Nicola Edwards**, of New South Wales (NSW), will spend 9 months based in Makassar, on the eastern Indonesia island of Sulawesi. She is working on an ACIAR project helping smallholder coffee growers boost their incomes by meeting the standards of the international coffee market. Nicola speaks Indonesian, has a degree in Indonesian studies and did her honours thesis on the movement towards sustainable agriculture in Indonesia. She will work with producer organisations in the Toraja and Enrekang regions of Sulawesi.

**Joshua Philp**, of NSW, is to spend 9 months in Gansu on the Loess Plateau in central China working on an ACIAR project that is improving the livelihood of farmers by developing more efficient crop-livestock farming systems. Joshua has a Bachelor of Animal Science from the University of Western Sydney and is looking forward to the opportunity to apply his knowledge of systems-based research in China.

Two AYADs have opted to continue working overseas.

**Sally Bolton** has just completed 12 months as communications officer with ‘Seeds of Life’ in East Timor. This food security program is helping raise crop yields by introducing improved varieties of staple food crops. Sally worked on a wide range of communications activities including writing, graphic design, web design, media liaison and photography. The Seeds of Life team says Sally developed a great web page and did a fantastic job developing their communications strategy. She now heads to Mexico to work with a microfinance organisation CrediComun through the Kiva Fellows program until August, but is very keen to return to East Timor.

**Tim Heath** worked as an agronomist on an ACIAR project in Tibet as an AYAD in 2009. He is soon to return to Tibet to continue work on the project helping local farmers and agricultural institutes overcome the shortfalls in livestock fodder and grains production. Tim grew up on a broadacre farming property west of Port Lincoln in South Australia (SA), and studied agriculture before working as an agronomist. He has expertise in weed control, which has a big impact on food production in Australia and Tibet. Tim is now an AYAD state representative for SA and a strong advocate of the opportunities the program offers.

Tim Heath (left) with Guoyi Liu, a crop nutrition researcher for the Tibetan Agricultural Research Institute, sampling soil in Quishui County, Tibet.
NEW PUBLICATIONS

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Reform of domestic grain markets in China: a reassessment of the contribution of ACIAR-funded economic policy research
A report on a reassessment of two ACIAR-funded economic research projects dealing with the reform of domestic grain markets in China. J.D. Mullen, Impact Assessment Series 64, 42pp.

PROJECT FINAL REPORTS

PNG AND THE PACIFIC


SOUTH-EAST ASIA


SOUTH ASIA


NEW PROJECTS

ASEM/2008/036  Improving livelihoods of smallholder families through increased productivity of coffee-based farming systems in the highlands of Papua New Guinea

ASEM/2009/042  Improving women’s business acumen in Papua New Guinea: working with women smallholders in horticulture

ASEM/2009/044  Improving development outcomes for smallholder farmers through closer collaboration between landcare and other ACIAR projects

CSE/2009/024  Sustainable intensification of maize-legume cropping systems for food security in eastern and southern Africa (SIMLESA)

FIS/2009/061  Aquaculture and food security in Solomon Islands

HORT/2008/041  Area-wide management of pest fruit flies in an Indonesian mango production system

HORT/2009/064  Strengthening the Cambodian and Australian vegetable industries through adoption of improved production and postharvest practices – bridging project

LPS/2008/038  Improving reproductive performance of cows and performance of fattening cattle in low-input systems of Indonesia and northern Australia

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