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# Guest Editorial

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While the world has achieved some truly great advancements in agricultural development to provide “food for all”, you will read in this edition of *Issues* that worldwide progress in reducing hunger remains slow and there are pockets of significant long term-chronic hunger in the world, including very close to home.

As a good global citizen, Australia should certainly be involved in the effort to address this situation. And from a purely selfish perspective there are definite self-interest reasons to be concerned with “food for all” and to encourage action in this area. World security is one of the more tangible returns from agricultural development, alongside reductions in poverty and hunger, reduced refugee flows, growth in trade, goodwill between nations, greater cultural, educational and scientific cooperation, and technological gains.

*Issues 89* has agricultural leaders, scientists, policy-makers and farmers giving their opinions on where the world stands with efforts at providing “food for all” across a number of agricultural sectors, but also how policy and research is managing the world’s need to double food production by 2050.

A number of contributors warn us that the food crisis of last year, felt in both wealthy countries like Australia and poorer countries around the world, is not over yet, although it has been somewhat overshadowed by the financial crisis. For the world’s poorest people who spend up to 80% of their household budgets on food, it is now a global priority to increase investment in developing country agriculture in order to fight poverty and hunger.

In case your attention to the food crisis has been lessened by the financial crash, or you think that the world food situation may have changed since last year’s world food crisis, we

have a number of specialists in this edition to set you straight and discuss what needs to be done to help you form an opinion on whether the end of hunger is attainable.

Dr Joachim Von Braun, Director General of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), sets the scene with the latest figures on our progress at reducing hunger (p.4). The news is not good. IFPRI has a special message on the need to unleash women’s potential to improve food and nutrition security for the long-term benefit of their children, households and countries. IFPRI also warns of the additional impact of climate change on food production, with forecasts that it will reduce wheat and rice yields, increase prices and result in an additional 25 million malnourished children by 2050.

Following that introduction to the rather daunting task ahead to achieve food for all, Dr Denis Blight from the Australian non-government organisation, Crawford Fund, goes on to explain the special role that Australia can play with its geographical location and climate but also its expertise in farming and agricultural research. He suggests important policy improvements for action (p.8).

One good example of successful Australian work has been in countries following wars and natural disasters. Colin Piggin, an Australian researcher in Syria at the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas, explains how Australian-supported work is helping Iraq, a country battling rehabilitation of its agricultural sector after war (p.11). Similarly, Australia and its partners have done tremendous work in Cambodia, East Timor and Afghanistan.

Coming closer to home, Nick Austin from the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research explains that while

there's a global effort underway to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and eradicate absolute poverty, Australia is playing a special role in our region through agricultural development and capacity building (p.14). He points out: "In the Asia-Pacific region and Africa, 70-80% of people are involved in agriculture. They recognise the fundamental role of agricultural research and development in increasing food production, improving their livelihoods and boosting economic growth."

*Issues* then moves on to looking at specific sectors involved in agriculture and what is being done to feed us all.

Water issues are considered by Dr Colin Chartres, an Australian who heads the International Water Management Institute in Sri Lanka (p.18). He also argues that Australia has a lot to offer the world through our own experiences with drought, water and land rights, water trading and water pricing.

It's hard to believe that in 2009, for the first time, fish for direct human consumption came equally from wild stocks and from farmed fish. Meryl Williams, another Australian working at the international level, looks at the important role played by seas, ponds, lakes and rivers in feeding the world, and how we transition from hunting to farming fish to help feed the world and save wildstocks (p.24).

Tony Fischer, one of Australia's most renowned crop researchers, runs through the key food crops and whether yield increases can be maintained in order to feed us all (p.29). He argues that increases in crop yield must be the major way forward if supply is to keep up with growth in demand, real food prices are to remain low, and only limited new land is to be opened up for cropping. He concludes that "we need high quality research, effective extension and good policy".

While Fischer explains the opportunities for breeding more nutritious crops, such as those fortified with micronutrients, Dyno Keatinge and Warwick Easdown from the World Vegetable Center reminds us that we cannot live by bread alone and that while vegetables, in all their modern and indigenous variety, are often overlooked in the global debate on hunger they offer important solutions to malnutrition (p.35).

Australians are great meat eaters. As countries develop we are reminded by Carlos

Seré from the International Livestock Research Institute that their demand for meat products grow and diversify their simple diets (p.40). He also looks at how we can best match this need for increased meat production with a lowered impact on climate change.

While the world's attention is focused on forests in the lead up to the climate change talks in Copenhagen, Frances Seymour from the Centre for International Forestry Research argues that the goods and services that forests contribute to human nutrition and agricultural sustainability deserve greater recognition when considering food for all (p.44). She writes: "A balance needs to be found between forest conservation and clearing land for agricultural food production".

While hunger in our region is significant, the world's attention has finally been focused on Africa, with the realisation that the agricultural development that has so positively impacted Asian countries since the Green Revolution has largely passed by Africa. Glenn Denning from the Earth Institute sets out why much of Africa hasn't managed to achieve the transition from subsistence to commercial agriculture as was achieved by hundreds of millions of small-scale farmers in Asia, which provided a foundation for unprecedented economic growth (p.49).

Finally Tony Gregson, a Victorian farmer who also chairs international and Australian agricultural organisations including Bioversity International and Plant Health Australia, discusses the threats to agricultural biodiversity and the important role of conservation as food for thought in the lead up to the 2010 United Nations International year of Biodiversity (p.53).

Hopefully when a future edition of *Issues* next focuses on food security issues, some of the research, extension, policy and funding considerations raised in this edition will have borne fruit and we will be further down the road to "food for all", regardless of any other world crises.

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