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Foreword

John Kerin

Paper prepared for presentation at the “The Supermarket Revolution In Food: Good, bad or ugly for the world’s farmers, consumers and retailers?” conference conducted by the Crawford Fund for International Agricultural Research, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, 14-16 August 2011

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Foreword

The Crawford Fund's first Parliamentary Conference was in 1993. We have re-assembled almost every year since to focus on vital food security issues.

For 2011, the topic was somewhat outside the range of subjects of previous conferences. Past topics had usually lent themselves to analyses that pointed to the need for increased resources and production, mostly for biological research priorities. 'The Supermarket Revolution in Food', by contrast, was obviously about the operations of markets and food chains, and the program of speakers addressed a wide range of the issues impacting on markets and access to them.

For this conference we were particularly fortunate to secure President Kuroda of the Asian Development Bank to provide a high-level overview of the issues of social and economic development facing the region — the context in which the supermarket revolution is taking place. We are grateful that he found time in his busy program to visit Australia at our request. We like to think that his visit is in recognition of the importance of the heritage of that other great economist, Sir John Crawford, whose mission, of research for development for poor people, the Crawford Fund seeks to encourage.

Keynote speaker Professor Thomas Reardon, also an eminent economist, has authored much of the extensive socio-economic literature in refereed journals and has worked with CGIAR centres on the conference topic.

This conference followed the Government's response to the Independent Review of the Australian Aid Program, which gave high priority to investment in agricultural research and development. The Government is to be congratulated on the lead it has given in moving Australia's aid budget towards a target of 0.5% of Gross Domestic Product by 2014–2015 and of allocating priority to research for food security for the rural and urban poor of the developing world. These sentiments continue to be a matter of bipartisan political support in Australia.

The program of the conference included two Question and Answer sessions — opportunities to link issues of markets, research and new directions for the Australian aid program in response to the Aid Review. We were fortunate that the Hon. Margaret Reid, a former colleague, a member of the Aid Review Team and Chair of the Crawford Fund's ACT Committee, was at the conference and part of the Monday Q and A panel to help with review questions.

This conference produced numerous outcomes, including interesting and useful pointers to the way ahead for the agenda in international agricultural research.



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