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Ministerial Opening

The Hon. Barnaby Joyce MP

Deputy Prime Minister



Sir John Crawford is one of the giants of Australia, and it's a pleasure to open this Crawford Fund conference. What I have always respected about Sir John Crawford is not only his obvious attachment to economics, with the Crawford School of Economics, but also his attachment to agriculture, setting up the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.

Why would it be so important to link these two? It is because you never get a purer form of economics than in relation to the capacity and the requirements of humankind to be sustained. We are in a noble profession in agriculture because our job is not to rip people off; our job is to feed and clothe people, and it's a mighty equation. And I've said this whilst in Europe and also in Asia, that if we get this equation wrong then the most dire thing happens: people starve to death. Therefore we have to stay on our toes.

What does that equation look like, ladies and gentlemen? Well, we're going to have 10 billion people residing with us by 2050 and they are sustained by protein, they are sustained by carbohydrates, they are sustained by fats, they are sustained by some sugars, they are sustained by garments. And, ultimately, that sustenance comes off the land, and our capacity to provide that sustenance is the art form that we dedicate ourselves to.

If you want to look at it another way, in the next 50 years – the next 50 years – we have to produce as much food as humankind has consumed to this point in time. We've had the Green Revolution with Norman Borlaug who has helped in the past. We saw the incredible turnaround, I think it was between 1946 and 1963, a six-fold increase in the wheat yields of Mexico. But unfortunately we've kept procreating and the population's caught up, and now we have to take that next step. And that next step is going to stand on the back of research and innovation in ways we've never seen before.

When we look at it, mankind (as a generic term) has had its revolutions in the past. If you look at the wheat gene as a hexaploid gene, it's more difficult to map than the human genome because we've been messing around with it for about 10,000 years, waiting for the providence of some mutation that we can build on in such a way as to increase the yields. You can see this is almost self-evident, not only in the genetics of wheat but also in the agronomic expertise that sits behind that.

In Rothamsted, in England, there is the longest running agricultural experiment in the world. It's been going for about 160 years, and in those Alternate Wheat plots (if you ever get a chance you should have a look at them because that is, in live form, the equation that's before us), one plot of a hectare produces about

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a tonne of wheat. With the same variety in a plot right beside it – on the same soils (and they're not very good, to be quite frank) but with all the herbicides and fertilisers and the issues that we have used our endeavours to build over time – you're getting 8–9 tonnes to the hectare.

The difference between those two is called starvation, and the difference between those two is called excess, and of course excess and economics bring advancement to economies because you have tradeable outcomes. So this is the great attachment between economics and agriculture.

We continue to put our minds to research and development. One of the scarcest resources in Australia is water. We've applied about \$13 billion to the Murray-Darling Basin. Why? So we can get better efficiency from each unit of water. And if you look within that water-use, one of the greatest increases in efficiency has been in the cotton industry.

Now sometimes the cotton industry is labelled a pariah, and I get annoyed by that because it's just like creating witches and throwing rocks at them. When I started some years ago in banking, we were allowed to say that the yield from an acre of cotton (we used imperial measures then) was 2.7 bales. If we said someone got a higher yield than that we had to tell the credit bureau why we believed this farmer was achieving an exceptional return. Nowadays, if you are getting 2.7 bales to the acre you will go broke very quickly. Now we are talking about 5–6 bales to the acre, which means, of course, you are using half as much water as you used to use. This is another form of efficiency. How? Well among other things it is because of genetic modification. This is one of the big debates we are going to have to have. If you don't believe in genetic modification, then if you've got a cotton shirt on, or cotton underpants or a cotton singlet, take them off, because it's all genetically modified. And while you're at it, remember that cotton seed is fed to cattle, so you had better stop eating beef as well.

We don't have the 10,000 years for the development of the hexaploid gene in wheat to get ourselves to 2050; we have merely a couple of decades. And we don't have the Green Revolution. Even that took a number of decades – time that we don't have in front of us. We are seeing right now that there is a downturn in nutritional intake, and more people under nutritional stress; that is happening right now! If we get this equation wrong, they will die. You won't see them – they won't be dying in Australia – but if this stack called the food bank, the quantity of food in the world, is unable to meet requirements then somebody, somewhere, is going to die, probably starting in Asia or in Africa, and maybe eventually in the Pacific Islands, but it will happen.

So we have an incredible responsibility, and this is why Sir John Crawford was so intent on issues such as dealing with tariffs, because you've got to have the free movement of food, the free movement of these products. You can't have a religious perspective about it; you have to have a practical perspective about how you deal with this issue.

I get a great sense of joy that agriculture is now the responsibility of the second-highest office in the land. Agriculture and water resources – and now minerals

in northern Australia as well. But we have to have debate about how we deal with issues such as intermodal transport, our capacity to move bulk products quickly and efficiently – we've got to have that discussion! We have to discuss developments such as inland rail to try and take the next step forward.

We have to have discussion about where to develop our water resources, new dams, so we can open up new areas. We have to continue in our research and development of paddy-free rice, because we know that growing rice in paddies in many instances offers a very cheap form of weed control and deals with the issue of diurnal temperature range (because the rice plant is not resilient to large daily temperature fluctuations).

If we can manage those factors we will have the capacity to start feeding more people and to show people our providence in doing the research and having the economic expertise to make this equation work.

Sir John Crawford, born in Hurstville in Sydney as one of 12 kids, working for the Commonwealth Bank, working day and night, had the aptitude to look out into country areas and say, "Here it is, this is the equation; this is what we've got to look at; this is what we've got to work out; how we fix this problem". And our nation has a vital role to play in this, an honourable role to play – an incredibly honourable role.

That you can say, "I've dedicated myself to clothing and feeding people; the results of my endeavours are that people are eating, people aren't going hungry" – that is an incredibly powerful thing and that's one of the things that keeps me attracted to agriculture even when people say to me, "Do you want to move to another portfolio? Go somewhere else?". This is it! If we get this right and if we can build on the work done by people such as Sir John Crawford, then we're doing a great job!

So I wish you all the best for today's conference. I look forward to seeing the outcomes, how we can deal with these issues. I trust you won't start saying, "Oh well, we're going to talk about this equation but we can't talk about rice. We're going to talk about this equation but we can't talk about cotton. We're going to talk about this equation but we refuse to talk about genetic modification. We're going to talk about this equation but we're going to start imposing on others ideas that are not really our business but theirs – such as 'you've got to stop having babies' ". No, I trust you will talk about the equation seeing the reality of what is before you, and working out how you're going to fix that.

We have to apply our minds and our endeavours to how we keep the free movement of trade, how we get the intermodal transport going, how we put the dams in place, how we work with the genetics so that we can get the best return per unit of land.

We have to stay mindful of the person in Asia or in Africa or the Pacific Islands, and be able to say, "Well, if I get this right, they eat".

If we can do that, your endeavours and the labours of your brain and the labours of your hands have a noble outcome. All the best and God bless.

Deputy Prime Minister, National Party Leader and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Barnaby Joyce, has been a member of the Federal Parliament since 1 July 2005 when he assumed the Queensland Senate seat he won at the 2004 federal election for the Nationals. Minister Joyce is currently the Nationals Parliamentary Federal leader. Previously, Minister Joyce was the Deputy Federal leader to Deputy Prime Minister Warren Truss after leading the Nationals in the Senate for just under five years. On 8 August 2013, Minister Joyce resigned from the Senate to contest the House of Representatives seat of New England at the September 2013 federal election. The seat had been held by independent MP Tony Windsor. In winning the northern NSW regional seat, Minister Joyce became the first person in Australian politics to have represented one state in the Senate and another state in the House of Representatives. In Opposition, Minister Joyce held a number of portfolio responsibilities including being the Coalition spokesman for Finance and Debt Reduction (2009–10), for Regional Development, Infrastructure and Water (2010), and for Regional Development, Local Government and Water (2010–13). Minister Joyce was the fifth child in a farming family of six children. He was born in Tamworth and grew up at Danglemah, where his family owned a sheep and cattle property. He was educated at Woolbrook Public School and St Ignatius College, Riverview. He studied at the University of New England where he gained a Bachelor's degree in Financial Accounting. Minister Joyce practised as an accountant, as a rural banker, and ran his own accountancy firm in St George, Queensland, for 10 years. Minister Joyce was appointed as Agriculture Minister on 18 September 2013. As well as his ministerial responsibilities, Minister Joyce was also appointed as chair of the Prime Minister's Water Infrastructure Ministerial Working Group. On 21 September 2015, Minister Joyce also assumed portfolio responsibility for water policy and was sworn in as Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources. On 11 February 2016, Minister Joyce became the Leader of the Nationals and on 18 February 2016, was sworn in as Deputy Prime Minister.