



Australian Government
**Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research**



MEDIA RELEASE

Date: 30/8/2005

Research partnership to benefit South African farmers

Farmers in South Africa will benefit from a research project which combines local and Australian expertise to introduce improved farm management practices. The project was launched in Limpopo today by Australian High Commissioner to South Africa, Mr Philip Green OAM, and Member of the Executive Council for Agriculture in Limpopo, Ms Dikeledi Magadzi.

The project, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and led by scientists from Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), aims to support farmers in Limpopo Province seeking to enter commercial markets.

An emerging group of smallholder farmers will benefit through improved productivity and sustainability by using better grazing and cropping practices and introducing well adapted grain and forage legumes.

Much of the land used for agricultural production by African farmers in the province is under pressure and, without suitable management, will not be sustainable. The new project aims to boost production and improve sustainability by introducing both legume crops and improved management techniques. It adds value to other successful ACIAR supported projects to introduce farmers to tropical legumes, help to develop profitable beef business systems and develop more appropriate nutrient input guidelines.

Legumes are able to improve soil productivity by increasing nutrient levels, providing a natural fertiliser effect that will improve the yield of maize and sorghum crops. The legume species introduced will also be trialled as forage crops to feed livestock. Improved livestock feeds will help farmers produce animals that are more suited to meeting market requirements.

Speaking at the launch, Mr Green said the Australian Government, through its aid program, was working to support the emergence of African farmers into the grain and beef markets in an equitable and profitable manner.

“This project is one of several that are opening up opportunities for farmers by building research partnerships that draw on the strength of Australian expertise and link this to South African researchers, extension staff and farmers.

“It is a crucial link in ensuring that farmers not only survive in the marginal farming areas of Limpopo Province but also begin to meet commercial market requirements and sell cattle and grains to these markets,” he said.

Project leader, Dr Anthony Whitbread, of Australia’s CSIRO said the project will also address the key issue of sustainability.

“The group of farmers in Limpopo that we are targeting are the emerging farmer sector. The gains that these hardworking farmers have made to date could be lost unless more sustainable farming practices are introduced. Through changing management practices and introducing appropriate grain and forage legumes we can help these farmers adapt their management to produce greater crop yields and improved cattle now and into the future.”

South African research capacity will also be increased through the project. In addition to learning while working with farmers and their Australian colleagues, staff and students at the University of Limpopo and the University of Venda will interact regularly with CSIRO scientists in Queensland through a video conference facility.

ACIAR was established by the Australian Government in 1982 to utilise Australia's agricultural research expertise to help developing countries through research partnerships. Such cooperation is making a significant contribution to raising the incomes of the rural poor. CSIRO is Australia’s leading scientific research organisation, focusing on a number of industry sectors through research and development. CSIRO’s research is undertaken and applied in Australia and beyond, including in partnership with ACIAR.

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