

Cultivating good research

In its earliest form, agricultural research dates back to harnessing the production potential of crops and animals through rudimentary selection and breeding – the start of early civilisations. In modern times, agricultural research continues to underpin societal and economic growth by lifting food and fibre production. The right mix of proactive government policies and enthusiastic farmers has helped to lift production levels that have so far kept global food production in step with population growth. However, as populations continue to rise rapidly, substantial research is again needed to ensure food production continues to expand.

Although research is often conducted to meet the demands of national agricultural sectors competing for market share, there are also research centres that work on the international stage for public good.

The Australian Government has contributed to the funding of such centres, along with a range of multilateral organisations such as international development banks, United Nations development programs and international health and environmental initiatives.

Building research skills takes time. Since the late 1960s, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has led efforts to deliver this expertise. Australian investment in CGIAR and other non-aligned centres complements ACIAR's work that links effective international agricultural research with aid.

Since 1992, ACIAR has administered the Australian Government's contribution to the CGIAR and other research centres. ACIAR allocates about 20 per cent of its total appropriation – A\$10 million a year – to fund international agricultural research centres (IARCs). This takes two forms: as non-project specific funding to support the work of IARCs with a comparative advantage in the Asia-Pacific region, and allocations to projects led by the centres. Projects involving IARCs cover the full range of agricultural research that ACIAR undertakes – economic/farming systems, cropping systems, natural resource management and livestock systems. IARCs are engaged to lead projects in cases where a bilateral project (involving an Australian institution as project leader and a partner country or countries) does not present the most effective means of delivery.

The structure of CGIAR and non-aligned centres focuses each centre on a particular area of agriculture, such as a specific crop (for example, the International Rice Research Institute), climatic region (International Centre for Agriculture in the Dry Areas), sector (Centre for International Forestry Research) or theme (International Food Policy Research Institute).

PARTNERS IN RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

Partners in Research for Development presents articles that summarise results from ACIAR-sponsored research projects, and puts ACIAR research initiatives into perspective.

Technical enquiries will be passed on to the appropriate researchers for reply. Reprinting of articles, either whole or in part, is welcomed provided that the source is acknowledged.

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Executive Editor: Lisa Wright,
ACIAR, +61 2 6217 0500
Managing Editor: Brad Collis,
Coretext Pty Ltd, +61 3 9670 1168

coretext

Design and Production:
Coretext Pty Ltd, www.coretext.com.au

Letters from readers are welcome,
and should be addressed to:

The Editor
Partners in Research for Development
ACIAR
GPO Box 1571
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia

Email: comms@aciar.gov.au
Photos: All photos ACIAR unless credited
Cover: Brad Collis
Back cover: Brad Collis

International collaboration

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Around ACIAR

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A Cambodian villager harvests rice: the International Rice Research Institute and Australian researchers are aiming to create one-line hybrid rice varieties to help boost yields (page 8).

Front cover: Improved rice varieties, such as this one under development in Cambodia, help developing countries increase food security and build a more commercially competitive rice industry.

Back cover: a young Vietnamese boy at a durian market in the Mekong Delta, south of Ho Chi Minh City.