

Media Release



FUTURE FARM
INDUSTRIES CRC
PROFITABLE PERENNIALS™ FOR AUSTRALIAN LANDSCAPES

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Call for agriculture to kick the annual crops habit and try perennials

Breaking the dependence on annual crops to meet the world's every increasing food demands can increase productivity and create environmental benefits according to US-based agronomist, Dr Stan Cox.

Visiting Australia to speak at the 14th Australian Society of Agronomy Conference in Adelaide, Dr Cox said to avoid a deepening of the food crisis and to improve global ecology, the limitations of annual cropping need to be recognised so that alternatives to growing food can be seriously considered.

"For example, with annual crops the no-till method of seed planting prevents erosion in the topsoil, but if it's done consistently on a large scale, heavier use of chemical inputs are required, which leaves the lower soil profile contaminated. Alternatively, the organic approach eliminates chemical usage such as herbicides but increases the risks of soil erosion and water deterioration through tillage," Dr Cox said.

"Annual crops also have a limited growing season, which limits their productivity potential."

Dr Cox is one of the plant breeders from around the world that has embarked on breeding programs to grow perennial counterparts of annual grain and legume crops such as wheat, wheat grasses, sorghum and sunflowers.

"With their longer growing seasons there is greater opportunity for carbon fixation and food production. Having a farming system that consists of a mixture of perennial crops can provide protection against epidemics and the vagaries of weather such as drought," Dr Cox said.

"As a result, such systems can produce more biomass per year continuously than annual agricultural systems with reduced requirements for fossil fuels and chemical inputs, and without any soil or water degradation.

"Ultimately, perennial grains when combined with established and novel sustainable agricultural practices can reduce the trade off between food production and ecological health."

The Future Farm Industries CRC, which sponsored Dr Cox's visit to Australia, has embarked on a research program to evaluate the potential for perennial wheat in Australia.

Early generation breeding lines, including material sourced from Dr Cox, are currently undergoing field trials near Cowra in NSW.

Dr Cox will give a presentation entitled *The Perennial Cropping Systems of the Future* on Tuesday, 23 September at 3.30pm.

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Future Farm Industries Cooperative Research Centre aims to transform Australian agriculture and rural landscapes by developing and applying Profitable Perennials™ technologies to innovative farming systems and new regional industries.
