# Australian International Food Security Centre – April Update

The Australian International Food Security Centre (AIFSC) recognises the significance of agricultural research, delivery and adoption in achieving food security in developing countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The AIFSC will provide a coherent Australian response to ensure sufficient, affordable quality food for smallholder farmers (including livestock keepers). Particular initial emphasis will be given to advancing food security in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The AIFSC draft Mission is to *accelerate demand-driven research, delivery and adoption of innovations for improving food security*, with delivery through an integrated program response focusing on key research priorities identified through consultations. This response links three innovation programs that reflect the key elements to improve food security — availability, access and utilisation — underpinned by three complementary cross-cutting programs.

## Mandate

Food security remains an ongoing challenge that Australia is well placed to contribute to, through utilising its expertise in agricultural research. The AIFSC was announced by the Australian Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard during the 2011 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The Australian Government has committed funding of $33 million over 4 years for the new Centre, which will operate within the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

The AIFSC’s draft Goal is to*: ensure sufficient, affordable, quality food is available for all.*

The draft Mission is to*: accelerate demand-driven research, delivery and adoption of innovations to improve food security.*

The challenge is to find ways to accelerate the delivery of research results that will have an impact on food security. This will require having useful research results to deliver, as well as an understanding of the constraints to uptake and delivery, and devising new modalities to overcome such constraints. The AIFSC will build on and extend the successes of existing ACIAR research programs by linking research outputs to development delivery agencies and facilitate collaboration between businesses and researchers. In time, it will also identify new approaches to accelerate delivery and uptake of research results, drawing on African, Australian and international experience.

## Geographic scope

The AIFSC is international in scope. However, the initial geographic emphasis will be on improving food security in countries of Sub-Saharan Africa; home to the highest proportion of the world’s hungry and where significant productivity gains can be made. In order to achieve success with relatively modest resources, the AIFSC will work with a small number of target countries within this region of Africa and on a focused set of priority programs, to deliver the proposed outcomes. The priority target countries will be identified during the consultative processes being undertaken during 2012.

## Strategy

The AIFSC Strategy is in the final stages of development, and is based on priorities and research capability identified through extensive consultations in Africa and Australia. The strategy complements existing aid endeavours through AusAID, ACIAR, CSIRO, the Crawford Fund and others. It identifies guiding principles for the Centre and key elements such as the Mission and program areas, modes of operation and results framework. The strategy identifies where the AIFSC will focus its activities in order to be most effective (to deliver greatest impact for food security) and how it could commission these activities.

## Consultation

The AIFSC is undertaking a range of consultations with African, international and Australian stakeholders to identify research priorities to improve global food security. This consultative approach is identifying areas that Australian and international institutions can contribute, through agricultural research partnerships with regional and national agencies in Africa, to improve food security.

African consultations have been held with a range of subregional and national organisations and institutes to discuss the scope of the AIFSC and to obtain views on research priorities. Meetings have been held with institutions of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS), the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), New Partnerships for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), the Syngenta Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture, Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA), and several bilateral donors including USAID and DFID and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Kenya.

Consultations at the national level with Australian stakeholders identified areas where Australia’s comparative advantages in agricultural research would be of value to African food security challenges.

Ongoing consultations will continue in Australia and African countries for the rest of 2012 as the AIFSC program develops.

## Proposed Program

In the delivery of the Mission, the AIFSC will develop three innovation program areas and three cross-cutting programs. The innovation programs will focus on enhancing the three interrelated elements of food availability, food access and food utilisation to improve food security. They will be complemented by three cross-cutting programs: addressing education and training, including gender issues; communications and knowledge management; and building resilience in food systems.

#### Programs for Improving Food Security through Innovation

* ***Program 1 Food availability***— improving sustainable productivity in farming systems, including better natural resources management; and enabling policies to enhance productivity.
* ***Program 2 Food access*** — generating more income from cash crops, livestock products and other rural enterprises to enable poor people to purchase food; enabling marketaccess for small holder farmers and livestock keepers.
* ***Program 3 Food utilisation*** — improving nutrition, increasing diversity in diets, reducing post-harvest waste, improving food safety and adding value to food.

#### Cross-cutting Programs in Support of Food Security

* ***Program 4 Education, Training and Gender*** —building individual and institutional capacity including: research institution building, research management, strengthening trade negotiations, addressing emerging issues and supporting farmers’ organisations.
* ***Program 5 Communications and Knowledge Management*** — bridging research and extension, fostering scaling-out mechanisms, empowering farming communities, knowledge management of policies, fostering uptake of technologies.
* ***Program 6 Building Resilience in Food Systems*** — adapting to climate change and variability so that communities and their food systems respond better to extreme climatic events and other shocks through risk mitigation strategies.

Over 2012, thematic workshops will be held in various countries in Africa to further develop the research focus of the programmatic areas and confirm operational partnerships. These will be attended by experts from Africa, Australia and international public and private sector, research and donor organisations. The AIFSC would welcome participation and identification of possible attendees.

## Activities

An approach of the AIFSC is to build on success by identifying a small number of projects aligned to the strategy for early initiation. The Centre has identified two such projects, now in the final stages of development. They are:

* *Improving sustainable productivity in farming systems and enhanced livelihoods through adoption of Evergreen Agriculture (trees in cropping systems) in Eastern Africa*. This project will run over four years in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi.
* *Sustainable agricultural intensification pathways for improving food security in maize systems in eastern and southern Africa: Socioeconomic dynamics, drivers of change and policy options for inclusive growth*. This project will run for 3.5 years in Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique.

A number of scoping and background studies have also been initiated to provide priority setting input and recommendations for future research priorities. These studies are in various stages of development and activity and include the following:

* *Investigating the role of small-scale mechanisation in conservation agriculture in rainfed maize-based systems in eastern and southern Africa* — Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.
* *Strengthening food security and value chain efficiency through family poultry and crop integration in eastern and southern Africa —* Tanzania and Zambia.
* *Assessing research priorities for blue water use in food production in southern and eastern Africa —* Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
* *Development of vegetable integrated management systems for enhanced food and nutritional security in peri-urban and maize-legume based farming systems in eastern Africa —* Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania.
* *Stock-taking and gap filling of knowledge and data to support improved strategic foresight for African agriculture —* Sub-Saharan Africa.
* *Characterising agricultural systems in Africa: data collation and analysis —* whole African continent.
* An impact assessment of previous ACIAR-supported research projects in Africa has also been commissioned, to further inform the development of the AIFSC program.

## AIFSC Modes of Operations

The AIFSC has a Director and a team of three core staff, appointed by ACIAR in the first quarter of 2012. The AIFSC Director reports to the ACIAR CEO. The AIFSC core staff and operations are located at ACIAR’s headquarters in Canberra, Australia. ACIAR also provides administrative and financial management services in support of AIFSC operations.

The AIFSC will open a small regional office within Africa, to act as an interface with African partners and to support the AIFSC’s operations in Africa.

AIFSC will interact with and draw upon the expertise of ACIAR’s scientific staff and a wider range of expertise in the scientific and development communities and the private sector. The AIFSC will develop new modalities to identify and involve a wider range of expertise within Africa, Australia and internationally to deliver on its Mission. These new modalities may include targeted calls for participating in the design and implementation of AIFSC Innovation Programs and Cross-Cutting Programs, as well as in the peer review of these programs.

The AIFSC will work through both commissioning activities and through Challenge Funds that are addressing specific priority areas. Commissioned activities will be in areas where African, Australian and international partners have clear comparative advantages; and particularly in the early stages of AIFSC operations in order to develop some early projects, which are consistent with its overall strategy. The AIFSC Challenge Fund will address priority areas within the Innovation and Cross-Cutting Programs, especially where there is the need to bring together an array of multidisciplinary expertise and public and private sector parties to accelerate research, delivery and adoption of innovations in Africa.

The AIFSC comes under the overall governance of ACIAR, which reports to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Oversight is provided by the Commission on International Agricultural Research, which provides policy advice directly to the Minister. The AIFSC will have an International Advisory Committee, comprised of African, Australian and international scientists and policy advisors, to assess and make recommendations on the partnerships, programs and projects to be supported by AIFSC.

## Conference

In announcing the AIFSC, the Prime Minister committed to host an international conference on African Food Security during 2012. The conference will formalise the Australia–Africa research partnerships and commit to the priorities of the AIFSC and will include African representatives and key Australian stakeholders. The date and venue are yet to be confirmed.

## Next Steps for 2012

* Continue broad engagement in Africa and Australia in the process of establishing the AIFSC, so as to build longer-term and supportive constituencies for AIFSC in both continents.
* Finalise and utilise the Strategy and Results document to underpin program and partnership development.
* Facilitate joint design workshops between African and Australian partners as AIFSC Innovation and Cross-Cutting Programs develop.
* Ensure a timely response to ideas through targeted calls for expressions of interest in participating in AIFSC network of expertise and in AIFSC programs.
* Initiate ‘fast track’ projects and background and scoping studies to start in 2012–2013, which are consistent with the overall AIFSC strategy and will inform priority setting.
* Constitute an International Advisory Committee for the AIFSC, with African, Australian and international participants.
* Initiate AIFSC challenge funds in specific areas of the Innovation and Cross-Cutting Programs.
* Finalise plans for the launch of the AIFSC and its strategy and initial programs at a high-profile international conference in 2012.
* Monitor the implementation of the strategy and the above actions to ensure the AIFSC makes a measurable difference to food and nutritional security in Africa.

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