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MEDIA RELEASE

Conference debates solutions to global food crisis

Will there be a crust of bread to eat in 2050? It's not such a ridiculous question; futurists predict that by 2050 the world may not be able to produce the food required to sustain its population.

Two authoritative sources have recently warned the world of a pending crisis in food production – Professor Julian Cribb (*The Coming Famine*) and Alex Evans (Chatham House Report (UK) – *The Feeding of the Nine Billion – global food security for the 21st Century*).

The global food crisis will be a keynote topic at the fifth annual Contemporary Scholars Conference, an international gathering of newly selected Nuffield Farming Scholars, to be held in USA in March 2010, in Washington DC and Pennsylvania.

Western Australian farmer and International Chairman of the Nuffield Farming Scholars, Peter Nixon, says answers need to be found to arrest the decline of rural populations – and the brain drain – as failure to do so will reduce society's ability to feed itself.

A total of 55 Nuffield Scholars will attend, from Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, along with delegates from like-minded associations such as the Eisenhower Fellowships (USA), the Executive Program for Agricultural Producers (USA), Global Dairy Farmers (Netherlands), Mexican Farm Co-operative and Uruguayan Farmers.

"The International Nuffield Scholars Association is keen to see a focused debate on how we can positively involve the world's governments to address a raft of issues that are vital to a sustainable food industry," Mr Nixon says.

"Society needs to re-evaluate its priorities. There is a perilous perception by governments and urban populations that food should be cheap, almost denying the business of agriculture. Yet they think nothing of paying huge sums of money, in some cases outrageous fees, to other professions and the entertainment industry.

"If they believe it is in a nation's best interest to maintain food prices at low levels, to the detriment of food producers, the obvious outcome will be a rapid decline in food production, and a continuing exodus of farmers from the food producing industry."

Mr Nixon says after decades of overproduction, underproduction in the future may well drive the political and social agenda as food shortages drive prices up.

"We need to understand the impact of high food prices on poor countries, and the threat of political instability that can arise. Governments must take the lead on these issues.

"The paradigm shift facing the world's population is to place more value on food to ensure the people who produce it can maintain an equitable and sustainable existence.

"At the moment there is a serious lack of willingness by governments to recognize this pending crisis, and to encourage a reinvigorated industry that can meet the challenges ahead. We need to encourage a new generation of farmers and halt the erosion of agricultural skills and knowledge," Mr Nixon says.

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A high-resolution photograph of Mr Nixon can be downloaded from www.coretext.com.au/communications_images.php

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