



Australian Government

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research

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partners

IN RESEARCH FOR DEVELOPMENT

A man with glasses and a mustache, wearing a blue lab coat, is standing in a greenhouse filled with tall green plants. He is looking directly at the camera. The background shows the structure of the greenhouse and more plants.

ACIAR in
AUSTRALIA

Benefits to Australia

\$31.9 billion is a significant return on investment in any language, the more so when the upfront expenditure is about \$2 billion. A recent meta-analysis of impacts from a selection of ACIAR projects, independently assessed to determine economic returns, found \$31.9 billion as the total benefits accruing. The \$2.3 billion is the total expenditure by ACIAR in three decades of research.

Some \$2.2 billion of those benefits accrue back to Australian agriculture. This dividend reflects the flow of benefits between partner countries (more than 90% of project outcomes) and Australia (around 7–10% of returns). ACIAR's international reputation is built on the outcomes of projects reaching poor smallholder farmers, helping them to escape poverty. Inevitably the returns overseas will be greater because that is the primary focus of the research and the base to build on is far lower than that of Australian agriculture.

ACIAR achieves such high returns by creating partnerships that meet the priorities of our partner countries. Because these partnerships intersect with Australian expertise, some benefits inevitably accrue back home. To paraphrase Derek Tribe, by doing good overseas we also do well here in Australia.

These benefits are not exclusively spill-over benefits in the true meaning of that term; benefits come from engaging Australian scientists on mutual problems shared with developing countries. Doing research that links Australian and partner country research scientists provides a domestic focus on similar problems.

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From this research Australia gains:

- knowledge and expertise, building our domestic research capacity
- exposure to the control and management of exotic pests and diseases offshore
- potential trade opportunities
- access to germplasm for the species – all introduced – that we farm
- funding for some niche industries and commodities otherwise attracting limited or no research
- new industries and commodity opportunities
- innovations in farm management and improved approaches to regulatory compliance
- improved land, soils and water management.

These benefits add significantly to a range of Australian agricultural initiatives. This issue of *Partners* tells some of the stories of those benefits and the people who help make them happen.

People such as Dr Jes Sammut, whose involvement with ACIAR highlights how this engagement works so well domestically as well as internationally. His work with ACIAR has led to new breakthroughs on a previously little-understood fish disease and its link to the exposure of soils by farmers. The result is a national management strategy in Australia and a range of policy initiatives in Indonesia.

Or Dr Sam Periyannan, who grew up on a farm in India and who has made a crucial contribution to a joint ACIAR, CSIRO and Grains Research and Development Corporation study that isolated a gene providing resistance against the stem rust Ug99, which was threatening wheat yields across the Middle East and India and is considered a grave threat to Australia's industry, should it find its way here.

Among the contributions to Australian agriculture also reported are: research into cereal drought tolerance; the emergence of an Australian sandalwood industry; a range of efforts to strengthen offshore quarantine and to protect fishing resources shared with our nearest neighbours; research that is helping Australian farmers save water; and the conservation of important germplasm. All have as a common feature: ACIAR research funding. The benefits that accrue are significant.

Through ACIAR's partnership model opportunities to link domestic skills and needs to international development help create wins for all partners.

As the CEO of Australia's National Farmers' Federation says on page 7: "Linking domestic RD&E priorities with ACIAR's work in developing countries is critical to ensuring that Australian agriculture continues to benefit from investment in international RD&E" ■

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