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New national sustainable food and land use project gets underway

A new initiative aimed at developing a roadmap for a sustainable food and land use system for Australia, was launched today.

The initiative aims to produce pathways for transformation of Australia's food and land use system to build agricultural resilience and food security; improve diets; reverse environmental degradation and biodiversity loss; cut emissions and sequester significant levels of carbon.

The new project, *Land Use Futures: Pathways to a Sustainable Food and Land Use System* is a partnership between Monash Sustainable Development Institute's ClimateWorks Australia, CSIRO and Deakin University. It applies the successful approach used in the Deep Decarbonisation Pathways project to develop energy sector pathways in the lead up to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.

This Australian project will contribute to and benefit from participation in the global Food and Land Use Coalition, led by international organisations such as the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network and the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis amongst others. It was officially launched today by world renowned economist Professor Jeffrey Sachs.

ClimateWorks Australia Chief Executive Officer, Anna Skarbek said the initiative will produce pathways that aim to achieve multiple Sustainable Development Goals at the national scale for the Australian land sector.

"Agriculture is an important economic contributor to the Australian economy, but it is also responsible for 12 per cent of Australia's carbon emissions and half of our fresh water consumption," she said.

"While Australia is blessed with abundant land, this land is finite, and subject to increasing competition between different uses. We want to understand how this competition could deliver all the outcomes we need from our landscape – production of healthy food and fibre for Australians and the world, reducing emissions and drawing carbon out of the atmosphere, environmental rehabilitation and increasingly energy production as well."

ClimateWorks Australia Program Manager, Eli Court said it was important Australia play its role in a strong global response to tackling the major challenges facing food and land use systems.

"Global food and land use systems are inextricably linked and will come under increasing pressure from strong population growth and climate change," he said.

"While under-nutrition and malnutrition remain a huge problem globally, Australia is grappling with an obesity problem. Many of the least nutritious foods are also the least sustainable to produce. And

despite the high environmental cost of producing food, it is estimated food waste costs the Australian economy \$20 billion every year.

“We need to start transforming our food and land use systems. Without systemic changes we will not be able to produce enough food and fibre for a global population expected to reach 10 billion by 2050, address diet-related health challenges, and at the same time restore biodiversity and tackle climate change.”

Chief Research Scientist at CSIRO, Professor Mario Herrero said Australia had made some progress in achieving sustainable food and land use practices but these efforts needed to be greatly accelerated to achieve the SDGs and our national climate targets.

“Since the industrial revolution, we have been experiencing ‘the great acceleration’ – exponential growth in everything from water use, fertiliser consumption, motor vehicles to fast food restaurants,” he said.

“We are in a pressure cooker at the moment. If we don’t do something to make our food and land use system more sustainable in the next 12 years, our chance will be gone. This means we have just 11 harvests to make that change.”

Professor of Global Change, Environment and Society at Deakin University, Brett Bryan said Australia can have economic growth and environmentally improved land use systems.

“In a resource constrained land system there are going to be some trade-offs between food production, protecting the environment and biodiversity and reducing emissions,” he said.

“We need to develop more sustainable food and land use pathways that will help us determine what are the most important goals, over what timeframe and what policies, industry initiatives and community actions are needed to accelerate that change.”

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