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Global food security – is the panic justified?

Concerns about global food security have a long history; and to date agricultural production has accelerated at critical times to alleviate these concerns.

However, the pressure on global food supplies has intensified over recent decades, leading to growing concerns about the ability of the sector to continue responding to ever increasing global demand.

“Limits to the ability of agriculture to respond to increased demand include a decline in the amount of land available to be used for agriculture, increasing competition for water, persistent agricultural trade restrictions, growing demand for animal protein and the diversion of agricultural production to non-food purposes,” said Mick Keogh, Executive Director of the Australian Farm Institute.

The latest edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* provides the views of a range of experts on whether or not global agriculture will be able to continue to keep up with growing demand for food. The papers include a comprehensive review of the current global food security situation, an analysis of global crop production trends and biofuels; and an article from Tony Burke, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on the challenges and opportunities presented to Australian farmers in responding to growing global food demand.

“There is almost unanimous agreement in these papers about the critical need for increased agricultural research and development investment in order to respond to the challenges posed by global food insecurity,” said Mr Keogh.

“Yet almost without exception Australian governments are reducing real public agricultural research and development investment levels, and dismantling much of the institutional capacity for such research.

“Some suggest that private agricultural research and development investment will fill the gap; however current global economic conditions mean that this is not likely to be the case in the near future.

“Faced with a future period of budget deficits, there is a very real risk Australian governments will continue to reduce investment in this vital area, leaving a legacy for future generations that seems likely to be as challenging as, if not more challenging than climate change.”

The February Quarter 2009 edition of the *Farm Policy Journal* also includes some recommendations from a Task Force formed by The Crawford Fund in 2008 following the rises in world food prices, in order to analyse how Australia can help world food security. The *Farm Policy Journal* provides an important review of challenges and opportunities for the Australian farm sector.

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