

Media Release

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US GOVERNMENT FUNDS US – AUSTRALIAN – INDIAN COLLABORATION FOR ABIOTIC STRESS TOLERANT CEREALS

A new research program is being supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with The Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics (ACPF) and Vibha Agrotech Limited to apply transgenic technologies to enhance environmental stress tolerance in cereal crops. The research is part of the US government's global hunger and food security initiative, Feed the Future.

The collaboration will combine ACPF's gene systems and technologies with the field evaluation and rice transformation capabilities of Vibha. A series of transgenic wheat and rice lines will be developed that show enhanced tolerance to drought and salinity stresses.

"A key role that Australia can play in helping to support food production is through collaboration and sharing of technological advances," said Michael Gilbert, ACPF's General Manager. "The Australian Federal and South Australian Governments established ACPF as a technology development and delivery organization. Through this support, ACPF is now recognized internationally as a leading organization in developing and applying the latest technologies to crop improvement."

Building global food security requires the careful evaluation of a wide range of technologies. Although genetic engineering is still controversial in many countries, it has been very successful and strongly adopted by farmers where available. This project will assess the potential of genetic engineering to enhance the performance of cereal crops exposed to environmental stress.

"We have to increase global food production by 60% by 2050, even as climate change is already affecting crop yields," said Dr Julie Howard, USAID's Chief Scientist in the Bureau for Food Security and Senior Advisor to the Administrator on Agricultural Research, Extension and Education. "That means we must use all the tools available to us to grow more food on less land and with less water. USAID is excited to launch this partnership and to leverage new expertise, resources and technologies to help make important cereal crops—and, ultimately, the smallholders who grow them – more resilient to climate change."

Technologies developed in Australia will be enhanced and transferred initially to cultivars of wheat and rice that are relevant in subsistence farming practices in India. The technologies developed through this research program will also be relevant more broadly in South Asia and other areas where climate stresses impact cereal yields.

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About Vibha Seeds

Vibha Agrotech Limited (Vibha) is one of the premier private crop genetics and plant breeding research organisations in India. It was established in 1995 at Hyderabad, with a vision of empowering Indian farmers by providing superior quality seeds. Vibha leads the Indian market with its R&D, production and distribution of quality seeds of 230 products in 15 field and 20 vegetable crops. Vibha operate in 22 Indian states through 5500 distributors and 250 thousand dealers, supplying 20 million farmers.

About Australian Centre for Plant Functional Genomics

ACPFPG was established in 2003 by the South Australian Government and the Australian Federal Government through the Australian Research Council and the Grains Research and Development Corporation. ACPFG scientists improve cereal crops' tolerance to environmental stresses such as drought, heat, salinity and nutrient toxicities; major causes of yield and quality loss throughout the world and significant problems for cereal growers. The future resilience of our food production systems in the face of a changing climate will depend upon the development and delivery of new technologies. For more information about ACPFG please visit www.acpfg.com.au.

About USAID

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is an independent agency that provides economic, development and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States. As stated in the President's National Security Strategy, USAID's work in development joins diplomacy and defense as one of three key pieces of the nation's foreign policy apparatus. USAID promotes peace and stability by fostering economic growth, protecting human health, providing emergency humanitarian assistance, and enhancing democracy in developing countries. These efforts to improve the lives of millions of people worldwide represent U.S. values and advance U.S. interests for peace and prosperity. www.usaid.gov

About Feed the Future

Feed the Future is the U.S. Government's global hunger and food security initiative. With a focus on smallholder farmers, particularly women, Feed the Future supports partner countries in developing their agriculture sectors to spur economic growth that increases incomes and reduces hunger, poverty, and under nutrition. More information: www.feedthefuture.gov

