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CLIMA WORKS AT KEEPING THE CUSTOMER MORE THAN SATISFIED

Customer needs must be surpassed, not just met, according to Trevor Flugge, Chairman of the Industry Advisory Group (IAG) to the Centre for Legumes in Mediterranean Agriculture (CLIMA).

Addressing the Group’s first meeting since CLIMA’s commercial launch last August, he added that the market place ultimately determined what growers could sell and research and development efforts needed to recognise this.

“A research alliance such as CLIMA, with its obvious scientific and technical expertise, must take a whole of product chain approach to strategy development and respond according to what drives the industry,” he said.

A Katanning farmer, the former AWB Chairman suggested legumes had to be profitable in their own right as most farmers would not grow them simply for their well known rotational benefits for following cereal crops.

Previously a federal government funded co-operative research centre, CLIMA now operates with $4 million worth of research funding, of which about $3 million, on various grain and pasture legume projects, is from the Grains Research and Development Corporation.

Significant contributions come from CLIMA’s four core partners: Department of Agriculture of WA, University of WA, CSIRO and Murdoch University.

CLIMA also has projects funded by ACIAR, RIRDC, GRC and ARC and increasingly seeks funds from private investors on projects of mutual benefit.

Now a centre of excellence in grain and pasture legume research and development, CLIMA leveraged the strengths of its core partners to address the problems and priorities of WA’s grain and pasture legume industries.

CLIMA Director, Kadambot Siddique, said the 19 member IAG was the most important source of the centre’s industry interaction, advice and feedback.

Professor Siddique acknowledged that the most immediate major challenge for Australia’s grain legume industry, which has a gross annual value of production of about $700 million, was disease constraints.
In WA, the most significant threats are:

- Anthracnose: had already closed WA’s otherwise profitable albus lupin industry.
- Ascochyta blight of chickpea: first identified in SA in 1996, has rendered chickpea production uneconomical over much of WA.
- Chocolate spot: has limited faba bean production.
- Black spot in field pea: has reduced yield and restricts its use in rotations.

“There’s no hiding from the challenge these diseases pose to an otherwise vibrant WA pulse industry and this is why CLIMA is actively pursuing local solutions (both resistance and integrated management practices), for the benefit of its farmer stakeholders in particular.

“Development of new pasture species with improved adaptation to hostile soil conditions, aerial seeding for easy harvest and adapted to short pasture phases, will recapture a significant role in WA’s farming system,” he said.

Professor Siddique noted that compared to cereals, grain legumes had a relatively short history of breeding and cultivation in WA, except narrow-leafed lupin, which had been bred and selected locally for more than 30 years.

“Experience suggests that breeding and selection for adaptation will provide a long phase of improvement in yield, yield stability and grain quality,” he said.

The probable maximum area of grain legume production in WA is 2.3 million hectares, or double the current area, with significant expansion also expected in the area under new pasture legumes.

In addition to its grain legume (pulse) program, which is headed by Dr Mark Sweetingham, (of the Department of Agriculture) CLIMA has an annual pasture legume program, headed by Deputy Director, Professor Clive Francis.

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