INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH EXPERTS DISCUSS AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT IN CANBERRA THIS WEEK

Canberra -- Increasing food supplies and conserving the environment in developing countries will be high on the agenda when the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research--CGIAR--meets in Canberra early next week. The CGIAR, which annually invests over US $200 million in agricultural research, is holding its 1989 mid-term meeting at the Canberra Hyatt Hotel, 29 May - 4 June.

Delegates representing various governments, foundations and development agencies will consider research recommendations to improve both conservation and productivity at the small-farm level. Finding ways that Third World farmers can increase food production without degrading soil and water resources is a long-standing goal of the Group's 13 research centers.

The CGIAR describes sustainable agriculture as the successful management of resources to satisfy changing human needs while maintaining or enhancing the quality of the environment and conserving natural resources. The CGIAR's evolving strategy on sustainability is founded on a report from its Technical Advisory Committee and fits in with the views of the U.N. Commission on Environment and Development, the so-called Bruntland Commission. The discussion in Canberra will be led by Dr. L. D. Swindale, Chairman of the Group's committee on sustainability.

The delegates will also consider the proper use and exploitation of tropical forests. Reflecting concerns about the destruction of the world's forests, a number of CGIAR donors are urging the Group to include forestry on its research agenda. Agro-forestry, which is the combination of trees and food crops within a farming system, is already part of the research of several of the CGIAR-supported centers.
Other agenda items:

Dr. Donald Winkelmann, Director General, will describe changes being made at the Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), Mexico, as the result of a external reviews conducted in 1988. Changes include the establishment of a biotechnology laboratory and increased work on growing maize and wheat under drought conditions. [Editors: see release on Australian-CIMMYT wheat research.]

A five-year blueprint for research on rice in West Africa will be submitted for approval by Dr. Eugene Terry, Director General of the West Africa Rice Development Association, WARDA. The plan includes significant increases in WARDA staff and funding levels, a reflection of the urgency of food production requirements in Sub-Saharan Africa. A similar five-year plan will be presented by Dr. L.D. Swindale on behalf of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, ICRISAT, in Hyderabad India. Swindale is the director General of ICRISAT. The Center is responsible for research on crops such as sorghum, millet and groundnut, all major staples in Asia and Africa.

Dr. Alex McCalla, Chairman of the CGIAR Technical Advisory Committee, will present a report on the sharing of responsibilities between CGIAR centers and developing country research systems. All the CGIAR-supported centers work to strengthen national research capabilities. Principal among these is the International Service for National Agricultural Research, in the Hague. ISNAR will be represented by Dr. Alexander von der Osten who is slated to take up responsibilities as Executive Secretary of the CGIAR in June 1988.

More About the CGIAR

The CGIAR—a consortium of more than 40 governments, international organizations, and foundations—collectively invests more than US $200 million
each year in agricultural research and training to increase food production in
needy countries. Research conducted by CGIAR scientists is credited with
providing an extra 50 million tons of grain a year to the world's poorest
countries, enough food to feed almost 500 million people.

The 1960s "Green Revolution" in rice and wheat production began as a result of
the work by two of the research centers supported by the CGIAR, the
International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines and the
International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center in Mexico. Since then,
significant progress has been made with other staple crops, including maize,
potato, cassava and legumes.

Australia, a member of the CGIAR since its founding in 1971, contributed
nearly $30 million to the CGIAR over the past five years. The Australian
contribution in 1988 totaled $6.1 million.