

Embargo: 6am Tuesday, 12 February 2019

DON'T SWALLOW FAKE NEWS – FACTS FROM FARM TO FORK

Media are welcome to register and attend and press releases are available on request. The 'fake news' workshop information is [here](#) and the AARES [program](#) is online. Please contact [Cathy Reade](#) 0413 575 934 for releases or to arrange attendance or interviews.

Public perception, fake news, and 'alternative' facts play a significant role in shaping public policy in agricultural and food production. The adoption of technologies needed for a sustainable future for agriculture and adequate nutrition for a rapidly expanding world population is being threatened by mis-information about them. How can scientists restore the balance and allow facts to win?

A who's who of economists and researchers working on agricultural and food policy around the world will address this issue at a full-day workshop on 12 February titled, '**Evidence-based Farm and Food Policy in an Era of Fake News,**' as part of the 63rd Annual Conference of the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) at Melbourne's Convention and Exhibition Centre.

"While there have been significant advances in technology in and outside agriculture that could help farmers and policy makers deal with game-changing challenges such as climate change, malnutrition and trade issues, the inappropriate regulation of technology is a growing concern. We need informed decisions based on science rather than gut decisions from opinion and perception," said workshop convenor, Dr Mal Wegener, Honorary Senior Research Fellow in the School of Agriculture and Food Sciences at The University of Queensland.

Dr Shenggen Fan, Director-General of the renowned International Food Policy Research Institute will focus on the benefits of technologies that can contribute to health and sustainability.

"Overcoming the multiple burdens of malnutrition—including stunting, wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, overweight and obesity, and diet-related non-communicable diseases—will require innovations that reshape food systems beyond business-as-usual," said Dr Fan, who is a world eminent economist and contributing member of the EAT-*Lancet* Commission on Healthy Diets From Sustainable Food Systems.

"Facing climate change, malnutrition and other challenges, evidence-based technology is key to buttressing food systems in Australia, Asia and elsewhere. New technologies, such as GPS, drones, laser, crop-sensing and gene technology, that are well used in Australia, can also help smallholder farmers produce healthier food in more efficient ways, from relatively smaller holdings," he said.

Misinformation about agriculture threatens sustainability and innovation according to Dr Alison Van Eenennaam from the University of California, Davis.

"Plant and animal breeders have been acting as glorified matchmakers for centuries, continuously employing new methods and technologies to accelerate the rate of genetic improvement. While people may have a negative gut reaction when made aware of them, these technologies have a direct and tangible impact on issues consumers do care about, that is, access to safe, nutritious food produced with a reduced environmental footprint," said Dr Van Eenennaam, a genomics specialist.

“It is imperative that agricultural scientists and breeders inform and become visible participants in public conversations about the importance of innovation in agricultural breeding programs”, she said.

The workshop will feature presentations from six highly distinguished speakers:

- *The Benefits of Multiple-Win Technologies in Agri-Food Systems*, Shenggen Fan, Director-General, IFPRI
- *How Misinformation about Agriculture Threatens Sustainability and Innovation*, Alison Van Eenennaam, University of California, Davis
- *How Social and Commercial Media Affect Consumer Perception*, Jill McCluskey, Washington State University
- *Rational Ignorance, Bad News and Food Policy*, Jo Swinnen, Catholic University of Leuven
- *Should Public Opinion Be Considered in Public Policies Such as GM Labeling?* Ellen Goddard, University of Alberta
- *Economic Reasoning and Evidence for Policy Linking Food to Farms*, Dan Sumner, University of California, Davis

These presentations will be followed by discussion sessions, each of which will be opened by one of Australia’s leading agricultural economists with a focus on what should be done about the issue.

The workshop will conclude with a screening of the film “Food Evolution”.

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