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Please contact [Cathy Reade](mailto:Cathy.Reade@aares.org.au) 0413 575 934 to arrange interviews.

SEIZING THE MOMENT - TRANSFORMING FOOD SYSTEMS POST COVID

COVID-19 has significantly exacerbated the challenges facing food systems, impacting livelihoods and food and nutrition security. We need to super-charge our efforts to restructure food systems to make them more sustainable and equitable into the future. This is the case for wealthy countries like Australia, but especially for poor countries around the globe.

This is the focus of the keynote address by eminent economist Dr Johan Swinnen, Director General of the renowned Washington-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Conference, being held from 7-11 February. AARES is the pre-eminent society promoting research relevant to Australasia in agricultural, environmental, food, and resource economics and agribusiness. The conference theme is *Resilience in a Time of Uncertainty*.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted local, national, and regional food systems in many ways in both wealthy and poorer countries. The crisis has had significant negative effects on livelihoods and food and nutrition security, particularly for the poor as well as vulnerable groups such as women,” said Dr Swinnen, who was formerly lead economist at the World Bank, and is a member of the independent Food Systems Economics Commission.

“It may come as a surprise to Australians who experienced supply chain disruptions from pandemic lockdowns that global food supplies remained remarkably resilient overall. Though food insecurity and poverty rose significantly because of the pandemic, the increases were due more to income disruptions – from lockdowns and loss of employment – as food supplies mostly continued flowing.”

“Rapid adoption of innovations, like switching to e-commerce and mechanising labour, helped keep food supplies steady in most places through the early phases of the COVID crisis, underlining both the potential and need for a turbo-charged restructuring of value chains.”

“We now have a potentially transformative moment for food systems. People in wealthy countries are more aware than ever of the impact that crises like COVID and climate change can have. We need to seize the energy from these crises to make the changes needed so that our food systems are more sustainable, equitable, and resilient.”

“To make food systems transformation happen we need increased funding for agricultural research. Funding for agricultural research has been essential in developing the innovations that dramatically reduced poverty and food insecurity over the past 50 years, as well as in strengthening the resilience of our food systems in the face of COVID-19. We cannot meet the coming challenges to our food systems without dedicated investments in the development of new innovations,” he concluded.

In addition to distinguished [keynote speakers](#), there are over 120 contributed papers across a broad range of energy, agriculture, development and environment issues. The full contributed paper program is available [here](#).