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*All media materials will be posted* [*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/AARES2024) *or available on request.*

*Media are welcome to attend – please contact Cathy to register.*

*The short program is available*[*here*](https://www.aares.org.au/Events/AARES-2024/program/) *and the detailed conference program*[*here*](https://virtual.oxfordabstracts.com/#/event/4802/program)*.*

*The abstract book is* [*here.*](http://www.aares.org.au/files/aares_conference_2024/Abstract_book_2024_01_31.pdf)

**Asia’s Food Systems: AUSTRALIA’S ROLE IN an uncertain transformation**

Can the negative consequences of the current food system be reversed, and can a food system emerge in Australasia that is healthy for people and planet? What is Australia’s role in what could be a win-win transformation?

These critical questions will be addressed by eminent economist Professor Prabhu Pingali,a global specialist on food and agricultural policy, technology change and impact assessment across the developing world. TheProfessor in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management at Cornell University, with a joint appointment in the Department of Global Development, and Chair of the Governing Board of [ICRISAT](https://www.icrisat.org/) will be speaking at the Australasian Agricultural and Resource Economics Society (AARES) Conference from 6-9 February in Canberra on *Grand Challenges at the Frontier of Applied Economics.*

“There are political and humanitarian reasons for Australia to be pleased to have seen and contributed to the phenomenal changes in Asia’s food systems over the past century, beating the Malthusian scare of widespread hunger and starvation. Agricultural transformation also kickstarted overall economic growth, moving most Asian countries into middle income status and healthy trade partnerships with Australia,” said Prof Pingali, who was formerly with the Agricultural Development Division of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and director of the UN FAO’s Agriculture and Development Economics Division.

“Asia’s move towards food security has not been without long term costs and unintended consequences. Strong political support for enhancing the supply of staple grains has resulted in reduced emphasis on the nutritional quality of the food system, and high levels of malnutrition and child stunting continue to persist.

“The ability to acquire a balanced diet is hampered by relatively high and volatile prices for non-staple foods. Intensification of crop production has resulted in significant environmental damage, and climate impacts.

“The slow growth of non-farm employment opportunities is widening rural-urban income disparities, and stubbornly high levels of rural poverty, particularly in dry-land areas.

“However, on the positive side, rising urban middle class demand for diet diversity can help induce a widening of food choices and create new opportunities for rural growth and health. Also, increased consumer awareness of food quality and sustainability could lead to improved incentives for environmentally smarter and climate friendly production practices,” he explained.

“However, the stickiness of existing agricultural policies and the difficult politics around policy reform could impede progress towards a more nutritious, environmentally sustainable and climate friendly food system, in Australia and further afield.

“Australian agricultural R&D organisations, such as the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, have been wielding so-called ‘soft-power’ and diplomatic impact as important conduits for information and technology transfer on smarter and more sustainable farming practices for decades.

“More broadly, and with more focused funding, support and research, Australia can play a greater role with its neighbours in a regional shift towards healthier food systems, while it also navigates this necessary transition from a focus on production to a holistic food systems approach that explicitly accounts for synergies and tradeoffs between food, health, environment and climate change,” he concluded.