Australia should get smart with “Smart Food”

SMART Food, like millet and sorghum, can tackle some of the biggest global issues of today including malnutrition, poverty and climate change because they are super-healthy and hardy.

Australia has the right agroecology to be a leader in spreading the ‘smart food’ movement and benefit from what is hoped will be a new food trend.

This was a key message India-based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics assistant director general, Joanna Kane-Potaka, delivered in her address to the Crawford Fund annual conference in Canberra this week.

“Smart Food – food that is good for you, the planet and the farmer – can have a major impact on the mega-global issues of malnutrition, poverty and environmental degradation,” Ms Kane-Potaka said.

“World agriculture needs to reduce the reliance on rice, wheat and maize which provide 50 per cent of the world’s calories and protein but crowd out other nutritious, naturally climate-smart foods.

“Smart Food that can be eaten as staples in developing countries can have a major impact on some of the leading global issues in unison.”

Mr Kane-Potaka said Smart Food like millets and sorghum were traditional foods of many countries across Asia and Africa, survived well in hot dry marginalized lands and would be suitable for Australia’s harsher agroecology, especially in times of drought.

“I have seen serious drought in different continents, as currently underway in parts of Australia. Of course, zero water does mean zero crops but millets, especially pearl millet, are one of the hardiest crops and basically the last crop standing in times of drought,” she said.

“They are a risk management strategy for farmers the world over. Australian farmers and processors would do well to reconsider them beyond a forage option as particularly climate smart.”

Ms Kane-Potaka said there was a need to develop the demand for Smart Food products.

“Australian consumers know very little about millets and sorghum. The few foods that are available on the supermarket shelf often just mention ‘whole grain’ and only the fine print indicates they are millet or sorghum.”

Ms Kane-Potaka noted some of the health benefits, with finger millet having three

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