CANBERRA — Since World War II, the primary goal for agriculture production and research has been in securing food and reducing hunger. But with obesity growing globally at a rapid rate and inadequate nutrition holding back even those who can fill their bellies, agricultural research is increasingly looking at improving the quality and nutritional value of food. That nexus between agriculture, food security, nutrition, and health was the focus of discussion at this year’s Crawford Fund Conference, held in Canberra on Aug. 13-14.

Here are the key takeaways from the conference.

Nutrition needs and food production are out of sync

Food and agriculture are at the center of the Sustainable Development Goals, and are core in the success or failure of achieving goals by 2030, said the conference’s keynote speaker and EAT Foundation Chief Executive Officer Alessandro Demaio. Today, 2 billion people lack key micronutrients such as iron and vitamin A, while 151 million children are stunted. Two billion adults and 41 million children, meanwhile, are overweight or obese.

A larger number of countries are now facing the double burden of malnutrition and obesity: Infants are being born into an environment with limited food, leading to stunting, only to face obesity as adults, when improved economic conditions lead to wider food choices. According to Demaio, the world is off track to meet global nutrition targets by 2030 and will continue to be so as the balance that is required for a healthy diet and food production remains out of sync.

The world is producing 11 percent fewer vegetables than needed, 49 percent less milk, 44 percent less fruit and 68 percent less nuts and seeds. At the opposite end, we are producing 48 percent more fish than needed, 54 percent more whole grains and a massive 468 percent more meat than what is required to support global nutrition needs, Demaio explained to the audience. And this is leading to the consumption of less nutritious food options.

It is a production model that is unsustainable to health and the global environment, Demaio said. 