

Global effort to cut waste

POTATOES SA

BY ROBBIE DAVIS, CEO

THE ABC's program *War on Waste* has raised awareness of the amount of food wasted in Australia each year, either because produce does not meet supermarket or processor specifications or because consumers throw it away uneaten.

The focus tends to be on the latter, with more than 4 million tonnes ending up as rubbish each year, at an estimated annual cost of \$20 billion. But there is 'growing' interest in the food loss occurring on-farm.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, one-third of food produced for humans is lost or wasted globally every year.

That amounts to about 1.3bt, costing more than \$1 trillion every year. In fact, 50mt of food is wasted in the US annually - sufficient to feed Africa for a year.

Radical reduction of food losses and waste (FLW) is a crucial issue to ensure global food security and to use the available resources in the best manner possible.



While there is a growing awareness of global food waste, attention mostly centres on consumers throwing out unused food, not on-farm food loss.

In fact, the United Nations has identified FLW reduction as a Sustainable Development Goal - by 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses

along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses.

Last month, I was fortunate to attend the Meeting of Agricultural Chief Scientists-G20 FLW workshop and

conference in Berlin.

Formal MACS members are the ministries or governmental bodies responsible for agricultural research in the respective G20 states as well as leading research institutions which strategically advise these decision-makers.

Their role is to advise on questions on agriculture and nutrition that are too great to be solved with only national efforts, to better coordinate agricultural research systems and to seek and apply common solutions strategies.

Convened by the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture and the Thünen Institute, 41 participants from 17 countries (among them 13 G20 states) met for three days to discuss the structure of a MACS initiative on FLW reduction and appropriate measures that promise highest possible impact, avoid doubling of existing initiatives of third parties and support efforts of other engaged stakeholders.

Success stories, barriers to awareness and action, upcoming challenges as well as transferability to other coun-

tries were addressed. There was also inclusion of FLW in third countries.

Presentations were from the World Food Institute, Berlin; French National Institute for Agricultural Research; University of Leeds; Food Innovation Taskforce, PIRSA; European Commission; FAO; Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands; the Rockefeller Foundation; and the Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International.

I came away with a much better appreciation of the global response to this issue, and the key messages/questions are:

- Specifying the right priorities does not automatically lead to solutions for the most pressing challenges.
- High investments in agricultural research create growth of academic knowledge but do not automatically result in real societal progress.
- We must involve the economy and wider stakeholders to address this.
- We must close the

innovation gap between research and practice.

■ Is it in fact cheaper to throw food away than recycle waste?

Finally, Australia is sitting up and the government has acknowledged the issue with its National Food Waste Strategy. But it remains focused on post-farmgate waste, not pre-farmgate losses.

This is being addressed by a PIRSA-led initiative - the Fight Food Waste and Fraud CRC Bid - which aims to protect the Australian food and wine industries and fight food waste in a circular agri-food economy. Potatoes SA and member companies are supporting this with financial and in-kind contributions.

There will be future instalments, particularly concerning the CRC.

And by the way, there is no such word as 'waste' in Europe!

■ Need to know more?

Learn about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals at un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-consumption-production