

AGRONOMY AND THE ECONOMY

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Australia farms the plants and animals of six continents under a wider diversity of conditions than any nation on earth. Our combined knowledge of landcare, farming and food production is unsurpassed -- but we have yet fully to appreciate its value.

By 2020, it is possible for agriculture to more than double its contribution to the national economy and to exports. This will not be achieved by increasing commodity output, but rather by developing and exporting the agriculture knowledge base.

By 2020, the world population will reach 8.5 billion, food demand will almost double and the threat of war, tidal movements of refugees, ecosystem collapse and economic upheaval will be a global constant.

Demand for the knowledge to ameliorate and overcome these threats and challenges will make it the rural sector's most valued export of all. It will be potentially worth as much as all the rest combined.

This will only be the case if the Australian rural sector takes steps now to plan for this situation, to expand and not diminish its understanding of sustainable farming systems, to integrate farming better with the natural environment and, above all, to constantly renew the knowledge base through research and fresh discoveries.