

La Trobe Institute to tackle Australia's food security

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Australia based La Trobe Institute for Sustainable Agriculture and Food (LISAF) officially launched, to undertake research and innovation across the agri-food-health chain, aiming to enhance profitability for producers while also improving product quality and choice for consumers.

Tony Bacic, LISAF Director Professor said a key component of the Institute's 'paddock to gut' research was to enhance plant functionality, enabling food and medicinal crops to be grown in innovative ways and with new properties to combat problems including climate change.

'Our new La Trobe Institute has a bold ambition to combine experts and programs in agrifood across production, business, supply chains and consumer preferences, with application of the latest technology, AI and Big Data, to create a unique one-stop shop across the span of agrifood,' Professor Bacic said.

LISAF will establish a \$28 million ARC Industrial Transformation Research Hub for Protected Cropping (PC Hub) with funding from the Federal Government, La Trobe and industry sponsors. The Hub is supported by a \$5 million Australian Research Council grant announced in June.

Protected cropping is the production of horticultural crops sheltered by structures to provide optimum growing conditions, protecting them from pests, diseases and unfavourable climate. The protected cropping industry is the fastest-growing food-producing sector in Australia, employing 10,000 people and worth \$16.6 billion annually, a figure set to rise by six per cent by the end of 2024, according to Hort Innovation Australia.

Professor Bacic said the PC Hub would transform Australia's horticultural and medicinal agriculture industries by addressing knowledge gaps.

"The food and medicinal crops industries are worth \$100 billion annually but face significant yield and quality losses pre- and post-farmgate that can be fixed through protected cropping systems of growth," Professor Bacic said.

"Our PC Hub will work to remove climate and pest-related losses, to show Australian growers the benefits of using protected cropping."