

La Trobe University launches \$27Mn Protected Cropping Hub to boost sustainable, high-quality food production

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La Trobe University has officially launched the Australian Research Council (ARC) Industrial Transformation Research Hub for Protected Cropping (PC Hub). This significant national initiative aims to transform how Australia produces nutritious food and plant-based products. The Hub was inaugurated on October 23 by Senator Lisa Darmanin for Victoria.

With a total investment of \$27 million, including a \$5 million ARC grant, the PC Hub is led by La Trobe's Institute for Sustainable Agriculture and Food (LISAF). This five-year collaboration involves three research institutions, six industry partners, and the Australian Government, all working together to advance innovative and climate-resilient food production systems.

La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor Professor Theo Farrell stated that the PC Hub aligns with the University's mission to drive research that enhances sustainability and human nutrition. "Protected cropping plays a crucial role in providing consistent, high-quality, and nutritious produce year-round. This initiative will help ensure a secure and sustainable food future for Australians while supporting the growth of premium food and medicinal industries," Professor Farrell explained.

Professor Tony Bacic, Director of LISAF and the PC Hub, emphasised that protected cropping is Australia's fastest-growing food-producing sector, employing over 10,000 people and generating \$1.3 billion in farm-gate value annually. "We are collaborating directly with growers and industry to improve crop yield, nutritional quality, and sustainability using energy-efficient greenhouses, smarter pest management, and precision nutrition systems," Professor Bacic said.

Senator Darmanin noted that the Hub would help strengthen Australia's food resilience and competitiveness in the global market. "The innovations from the PC Hub will assist our farmers in adapting to climate challenges while expanding export opportunities for high-value, nutritious food products and plant-based therapeutics," she stated.