**HE GEOFF TOOTH, AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO KENYA,**

**SPEECH TO**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP, 29 OCTOBER 2013, NAIROBI**

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Isaac Mbeche of the University of Nairobi

Professor Mwangombe

Mr Nyaga, Head Crop, Postharvest Sub Division, State Department of Agriculture,

* I am delighted to join you today at this important event.
* Can I begin by thanking all the representatives of our partner government present today, the Universities of Nairobi and Sydney for their ongoing support, and role as participants and facilitators of this workshop, and of course, our awardees and Alumni.

* A key objective of the Australia Awards program is to develop alumni who are better equipped to lead accelerated progress towards achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Africa. We have seen significant gains on agricultural productivity, food security and markets for African products in recent years but the challenges that remain are enormous, particularly to meet the demographic growth that will be a feature of sub-Saharan Africa in coming decades.
* Australia Awards are designed to build the capacity and leadership skills of Africans so that they can more effectively contribute to development.
* Through exposure to and influence by Australia’s education system, our government and the private sector, we hope that awardees like yourselves, will help drive forward the development agenda and be agents of change.
* The Australia Awards program is increasingly relying on developing in-country networks to help deliver on these objectives and our alumni are considered an important part of this strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen

* The Australia Awards have always been a strong part of Australia’s development cooperation program in Africa:
  + The Africa Fellowships component commenced in 2011, with 13 courses offered for 131 Awardees. In 2012, implementation of the Africa Fellowships was expanded to 29 courses and 343 Awards across 50 African nations.
  + Since 2011, the Australian Government has provided over 2600 Australia Awards across Africa.

* The Australia Awards is an opportunity for all people, including those with disability and has a focus on women’s economic participation and empowerment;
* But perhaps of greatest significance to me as an Australian High Commissioner and Ambassador is that Alumni from Australian institutions become a vital bridge in the relationship between Australia and Africa. In my three years in East Africa I have seen our alumni work to maximize opportunities for cooperation in business, trade and development on both sides of the Indian Ocean. It is vital to all our futures that this continues.

Ladies and gentlemen

* Australia is involved in building food security in Africa because we have particular strengths and expertise in agriculture. Our agricultural sector has much in common with Africa - our continents share dry and unpredictable climates, often poor-quality soils, challenging landscapes and vast distances. In response to these challenges Australia has built considerable scientific and technical expertise in agricultural productivity and trade. Only 6.5 percent of Australian land is arable yet we are now one of the world’s great agricultural exporters – some 65% of our farm product is sent to world markets creating considerable wealth for our economy and farmers.
* We are already sharing these skills and experience with a number of key partners in Africa. Specifically, our funding is being used to further agricultural research and development across the continent; to increase market access for rural farmers; and to support social safety nets programs that will help the most vulnerable people become resilient to food insecurity through risks and shocks.
  + In Africa, we are helping build agricultural productivity through improved research and adoption; this involves activities which address availability, access and nutrition related food security challenges. These activities have a strong regional component and broad geographic spread.
  + We are also helping build community resilience and sustainable livelihoods; this involves activities which directly address access-related challenges to food security including through social protection activities.
* Australia is committed to supporting African-led development strategies and our food security work aligns with the framework of the Africa Union’s Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP).

Ladies and gentlemen

* Much of Australia’s assistance is being delivered through two African regional organisations to further build African capability in agricultural development:
  + A research partnership between CSIRO and Biosciences East and Central Africa (BecA) is for instance helping increase crop and livestock productivity, develop control options for livestock diseases, and building local capacity to improve incomes and long-term food security for millions of smallholder farmers in East, Central and West Africa.
  + The CSIRO BeCA partnership is running maize breeding field trials to reduce aflatoxin levels in maize, which is a staple food in Africa. By making changes to available varieties, breeding techniques and management practices, this will reduce aflatoxin, benefitting 11 million small holder farmers who grow maize in Tanzania and Kenya.
  + Under the CSIRO partnership with the Western and Central African Council for Research and Development (CORAF/WECARD), research projects in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Ghana, and Niger are helping smallholder dry-land farmers to increase productivity and farm incomes through better management of farm inputs including nutrients, water and biomass.
  + In addition to AusAID supported initiatives being delivered by CSIRO, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is also working to increase Africa’s long-term agricultural productivity. ACIAR has established a Food Security Centre in Nairobi to leade our efforts. I am delighted to see Liz Oguthu of the Centre in the audience today. Liz and the Centre are going to be an increasingly important player in the African food security story over coming years.
  + ACIAR’s work in east and southern Africa is expected to improve maize and legume productivity by 30 per cent on approximately 500,000 farms within 10 years.
* Since 2011, Australia, in partnership with the UK, has also been supporting a Hunger Safety Net Program (HSNP) in Northern Kenya to deliver regular guaranteed cash transfers to approximately 850,000 chronically food insecure people.
* To complement the Hunger Safety Net Program activity, Australia also supports a climate change adaption initiative called Index-Based Livestock Insurance (IBLI). IBLI is a private-public partnership enabling Kenyan pastoralists to insure their main asset, livestock, against drought.

Ladies and gentlemen

* We have amongst us today, sixteen (16) Fellows from across eight (8) African countries that participated in the Post-harvest Management of Maize, Rice and Legumes course delivered by the University of Sydney in partnership with the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa, and the University of Nairobi.

* You (the Alumni) have brought back the theoretical and hands-on understanding of Post-harvest management technologies and approaches that can be adapted to your own environments. We hope that you will also be part of an enduring network in Post-harvest management field, both within Africa, and between African and Australian people and organisations.
* I understand a further focus of your training has been the development of knowledge and skills around change-management, communication and leadership, so that lessons learned are effectively transferred to the workplace and disseminated amongst colleagues. This is so important. Too often costly science programs and vital skills are wasted because we don’t put enough emphasis on outreach and training.
* A distinct feature of the Australia Awards program is the concept of a Work Plan on Return. Not only does this solidify new knowledge and skills learned by awardees, it also serves as a guide for you to effect change on return to your workplace:
* Following an awardee satisfaction survey conducted in 2012, 95% of awardees stated that their course had assisted them to develop a Work Plan on Return that was meaningful to their organisation. This is a 13% increase from a similar survey conducted in 2011;
* I am delighted to hear of other positive outcomes for our awardees. These include:
* awardees who have been promoted to higher positions;
* or have been transferred to jobs with increased responsibility;
* presenting at conferences and participation in committees and working groups;
* establishing new units within their Ministries; and
* most importantly, increased confidence to provide stronger leadership and influencing superiors in decision making.

Ladies and gentlemen

* Let me say in conclusion that none of us can afford to rest on our laurels. More than two thirds of Africans are dependent on agriculture for their income and basic food needs, and there are enormous challenges ahead. You and your colleagues across Africa are key to meeting these challenges and I urge you to make the most of this professional networking opportunity. Don’t be afraid to tell us where we are going wrong or where we can improve too - I hope that at the end of this workshop your joint suggestions and inputs can help us enhance the delivery of our future Awards program.
* Thank you. Asanti Sana