

Strengthening crop management across the Pacific

24 February 2012

The University of Queensland (UQ) is heading an international collaboration to further the sustainable development of high-value crops in the Pacific Islands.

Dr Mike Furlong, from UQ's School of Biological Sciences, is leading the \$3.47m five-year Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) project to diagnose and research emerging pest and disease problems before they impact on newly intensified crops.

Dr Furlong will coordinate research teams to work closely with policy makers and farmers throughout the region to improve the long-term livelihoods of subsistence farmers and sustainably develop more intensive crops.

"An overall aim of the project is to strengthen and sustain research capacity in the region through collaborative research projects and work with local farmers to encourage the adoption of improved crop management practices," Dr Furlong said.

The project will be run by UQ in close collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), the Asian Vegetable Research and Development Centre (AVRDC) – The World Vegetable Centre and national government ministries responsible for agriculture in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Solomon Islands.

Activities will begin with the project inception workshop in Fiji this month, which will be attended by the international research team and other project and industry stakeholders.

"The project will enable us to continue our applied research in biological control and other environmentally friendly methods of insect pest management developed in previous ACIAR projects," Dr Furlong said.

"We will also develop and implement national strategies for insecticide resistance management of a key pest of the region, which has become resistant to many of the insecticides that are currently available to farmers."

In addition to the ACIAR funded project activities, project personnel will coordinate and implement a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) funded Technical Cooperation Project, which is based on previous ACIAR funded research conducted by UQ, SPC, the Ministry of Primary Industries, Fiji and Ministry of Agriculture, Samoa.

This two-year \$480,000 project will assist SPC and the national governments of Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Tonga to increase capacity to develop and implement strategies that reduce inputs of hazardous pesticides into agricultural systems.

For more information on the ACIAR project, "Strengthening integrated crop management research in the Pacific Island in support of sustainable intensification of high-value crop production", visit the ACIAR website.

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