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Media Release

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From Pods of Promise to Grains of Gold - The future of the Australian grains industry

Two of Australia's agribusiness leaders will today (Tuesday) present their visions for the future of the Australian grains industry at a breakfast being held in their honour in Canberra.

Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited will host a celebratory breakfast for Dr Jim Peacock, Chief, CSIRO Plant Industry and Professor John Lovett, Managing Director, Grains Research and Development Corporation (GRDC) – both of whom will leave their current positions in December.

"We are honoured to present this opportunity to share the career highlights and industry visions of these two outstanding individuals," said Paula Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited.

"Their combined contributions to Australian agriculture and their leadership have been enormous and they have ensured that Australia is well placed to meet the challenges of the future and remain competitive in the global economy," Ms Fitzgerald said.

Dr Peacock has witnessed major changes in Australia's cropping sector since becoming Chief of CSIRO Plant Industry in 1977. His division is one of the world's leading plant research institutes, recognised internationally in the field of molecular biology, and it has delivered many outcomes for Australian growers.

"Partnerships along the business chain, high-technology breeding, decision support systems, phase farming and biotechnology are just some of the innovations CSIRO researchers have developed and delivered to the grains industry," said Dr Peacock.

Dr Peacock cited *Graingene* – an initiative involving AWB Limited, CSIRO Plant Industry, GRDC and Syngenta – as a pertinent example of a partnership focused on outcomes for growers.

"*Graingene*, which has already delivered the drought-tolerant wheat variety 'Drysdale', is focused on product delivery, integration, and providing a gateway from the laboratory to the paddock and the marketplace," said Dr Peacock.

“The new CSIRO joint venture company, HRZ Wheats Pty Ltd, also has a specific end-product focus, aiming to breed and commercialise high-yielding, disease resistant, milling quality wheat varieties for high rainfall zones,” he said.

“A more targeted product delivery focus, combined with innovative tools like biotechnology to combat problems such as drought and salinity, will see the grains industry well placed to meet future challenges,” said Dr Peacock.

Professor Lovett has been at the helm of the GRDC since 1994, and prior to this he was the GRDC Operations Manager. He came to the GRDC from a distinguished academic career at the University of New England, where he was the Head of the Department of Agronomy and Soil Science.

“The Australian grains industry has gone through an enormous period of growth over the last decade, from a gross value of less than three billion dollars per year to eight billion dollars a year, and the GRDC has reflected this growth, with an annual budget today of \$120 million to invest in key research priorities,” said Professor Lovett.

“I am proud of the achievements of the GRDC,” he said. “We have built a research capacity with critical mass and one which has the ability to compete with the best in the world,” he said.

“The grains industry is a high technology industry and we need to ensure our researchers are encouraged and supported in this area,” he said.

“There are challenges ahead for the industry, but I think we are well placed to provide benefits to graingrower stakeholders, and through government involvement, the community at large,” said Professor Lovett.

Dr Peacock will end his term as Chief of CSIRO Plant Industry on 14 December, but will continue with CSIRO as a Research Fellow, in addition to his current position as President of the Australian Academy of Science. Professor Lovett completes his term with GRDC on 31 December. Commencing in 2004, he has accepted the position of Chairman of Agrifood Awareness Australia Limited.

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The agribusiness breakfast will be held from 7am at the Hotel Kurrajong, National Circuit, Barton, Canberra.

For further information contact:

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