



ARC TRAINING CENTRE FOR FUTURE CROPS DEVELOPMENT

IMAGE: NIC VEVERS



CENTRE TURNS THREE!

By *Lauren DuFall and Julie Leroux*

As we approach the end of our **third year as a Centre**, we are incredibly proud of what we have achieved across our research-industry collaboration. Our **Annual Meeting** in June was a fantastic celebration of this and thank you to everyone who attended and a special thanks to all of our partners who came to support, see our progress and interact with our incredible cohort of early career researchers.

A huge piece of news from the Centre is the **thesis submission** of our first PhD student - **Yiting Xie, CONGRATULATIONS!**

Our students have continued to shine attending conferences, producing publications, engaging with the public, winning awards and interacting with industry and community through placements and engaged research. We are pleased to include **highlights** of these in this newsletter.

Our **research leaders** have busy as always supporting our students and fellows but also dealing with the disruption across the Universities with mergers and restructures presenting many challenges. We would like to recognise the incredible work by these passionate people who continue to show up for research, industry and their peers.

Our recent annual meeting was a catalyst in getting us all thinking about what comes next for the Centre and as we enter this next year we are embarking on building ideas and proposals to ensure we can continue making progress for a bright future for Ag.

THINGS TO NOTE

**PROJECT VALUE-ADD
APPLY TO THE NEXT
ROUND BY 19 SEPTEMBER**

APPLY NOW >>

**TECHNICAL OFFICER -
ANU
APPLY BY 3 SEPTEMBER**

APPLY NOW >>

**CENTRE TURNS THREE
ON 1 SEPTEMBER 2025!**

LET'S GET CONNECTED



Socials



IMAGE: REBECCA TYRRELL

Highlights from the Centre

ANU media

We're proud to support our students through strong engagement with industry leaders—helping turn research into real-world impact.

THANK YOU!

nufarm



Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development



for supporting **Reshma's** research.



Read her full story on the dual purpose of carinata and her experience on placements [here](#).

KONEKSI
Knowledge Partnership Platform
Australia - Indonesia

Congratulations to **Joan, Emily** and Gloria! They had their **paper** accepted in Plant Cell Reports, which is the results from the KONEKSI project.



"This paper draws on the first qualitative exploration of Indonesia's evolving regulatory landscape for gene technologies...We argue that meaningful engagement must occur early in the development process, within the specific social and cultural contexts of Indonesia, to ensure that biotechnology aligns with local needs and values. By integrating social perspectives into regulatory and research agendas, Indonesia can better navigate the complexities of GE crop adoption and governance."

Articles

Congratulations to **Jing, Hendry, Sadia, Barry, Bob, Gonzalo and Harsh!**

Their [review paper](#) has been published in Plant and Cell Physiology.

JOURNAL ARTICLE ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

Pod Photosynthesis: A New Frontier for Developing Stress-Resilient and High-Yielding Crops

Jing Zhang, Hendry Susila, Sadia Majeed, Gonzalo M Estavillio, Harsh Raman, Barry J Pogson, Robert T Furbank

Plant and Cell Physiology, pcaf090, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pcp/pcaf090>

Published: 05 August 2025 Article history

Congratulations to **Michail, Rachel and Emily!** Their [review paper](#) has been published in The Plant Journal.



"Many scientists working in agricultural genomics believe that current regulatory approaches are problematic, often emphasizing that the regulatory system is merely a 'bottleneck' that limits research and innovation in crop sciences...but we contend that what counts as a 'bottleneck' depends on point of view and the interests and goals of the party that wishes to describe a particular situation as bottlenecked."

Our KONEKSI project has been featured in [Indonesian national newspapers](#). **Barry** and Yekti (our Indonesian collaborators), discussed plant genome editing and rice biodiversity at a climate policy forum in Jakarta.

The article is in Indonesian—your browser should automatically offer an English translation!



Awards

Seed Business 2025

Christchurch

“What excites you about the future of agriculture?”



We're delighted to announce that Sadia and Ava have been selected to attend Seed Business 2025 in Christchurch, thanks to the generous support of Enza Zaden and The Future Crops Training Centre, which made it possible to award not one, but **two scholarships** this year.

While Enza Zaden was impressed by all the applications, Sadia and Ava were selected due to their thoughtful insights, obvious energy and enthusiasm for the industry. We're sure they will be excellent representatives at Seed Business. Thank you again to all who applied, and to Enza Zaden and the Future Crops Training Centre for supporting student engagement in the seed industry. We look forward to continuing to engage with you all.

Katherine & Lauren

We're thrilled to be selected. We're looking forward to representing students and learning more about the seed industry at this fantastic event.

-Sadia

ARC Linkage Success!

A huge congratulations to **Bob, Barry, Florence** and partners **Steven King** (Corteva); **Raymond Cowley** (Corteva); and **Harsh Raman** (NSW DPIRD) and in particular **Jing Zhang** who put a huge amount of work into this project proposal (in various forms!).

What a fabulous outcome and a new partner involved in building our **canola work!**

Corteva are not a current partner to the Training Centre however this is a promising step in the partnership that might create opportunities for our future Centre initiatives.

Project Value-Add

We recently wrapped up the first round of Project Value-Add funds and we're happy to announce that three applications were awarded.

Well done to:

- **Nay Chi Khin** - "Dissecting genetic basis of pod shatter resistance in Brassica carinata through transcriptome profiling" - \$10,925
- **Rebecca Tyrrell** and **Zuzana Plšková** - "Assessing wheat drought tolerance and energy use efficiency during wheat development" - \$10,000
- **James Nix** - "Tissue-Enriched Proteome of Model C₄ Setaria viridis Under Different Growth Conditions" - \$7,980

Applications for the **next round** of [Project Value-add funds](#) will close **September 19th**, so talk to your supervisors to discuss where extra funding could elevate your projects.

Centre Affiliates

Congratulations again to **Hendry** and **Julian**, who are now taking on their new roles — a DECRA and a GRDC Fellowship.

Like **Neelam**, we are grateful they will continue supervising students and are now part of our Centre Affiliates.



IMAGE: NIC VEVERS

Visits

Boorowa Agricultural Research Station (BARS)

by M. Arslan Mahmood

On the 12th of August, I visited the Boorowa Agricultural Research Station (BARS) with Dr Susie Sprague and her team. The aim of this one-day tour was to **take data on the germination** of commercial canola cultivars that are growing in the BARS field with **high blackleg inoculum**.

For the first time, I witnessed infected canola cotyledons with blackleg ascospores and also learned how to collect data in the field. This is a good experience for my project as I have started to screen my gene-edited canola lines under blackleg stress in the glasshouse.



IMAGES: ARSLAN MAHMOOD



Ola visited **Long Reach Field trial** sire at Freeling SA on 18/07/2025, where his wheat EMS population is been screened for resistant to PPO inhibiting herbicides.



IMAGES: OLA AMOO

DPIRD, Wagga Wagga

Lauren DuFall, Mary Ma, Florence Danila, Anu Devi Allu and her daughter Yuktha visited Wagga Wagga in July as part of the **GRDC Visiting Fellowship**, for Mary's **pod shatter** experiments and to check field trials for a new collaboration between DPIRD and ANU in Canola (source-sink). Wagga did NOT fail to impress with the Winter Festival including indigenous artwork, lights and even ice skating! See the Festival of W here >>>



OzBarley field, Roseworthy

by Qiwei Shen

I am testing the performance of our new **Hiphen Literal imaging system** in the OzBarley field, which mounted two RGB cameras and one NIR camera. By capturing several images per plot, this system is able to generate useful metrics, including **green cover, plant height, and NDVI**, through its cloud-based post-processing pipeline, which shows potential for cost-effective, plot-level monitoring of plant status.



Chickpea Breeding Program Visit and Tamworth Agricultural institute

We (**Asma, Nay Chi, Rose, Alex, Edward, Manny and Lauren**) had the fabulous opportunity to visit the **Chickpea Breeding Program** at the Tamworth Agricultural Institute (**a joint venture of DPI and GRDC**). A lot of interesting experiments to learn about, field trips and sunny weather. It was amazing to learn about the chickpea breeding and how much time it takes to develop that ONE seed.

Highlights of some of the experiments and field trials in Tamworth and Breeza going on:

- Chickpea yield stability and heat tolerance in desi and kabuli types (field trials)
- Aschochyta blight resistance field trials
- Chickpea hydroponics infrastructure
- Chickpea speed breeding optimized setup (takes 20-25 days to flower instead of 45-55) reduces generation time to 3 months from 6 months.
- N-fixation experiments
- Drones to measure plant phenotype in field trials.

Apart from chickpea, there is also work on cereals such as wheat.

- A field trial on wheat genotype/ environment interaction, soil nutrition and wheat yield trials.

These trials are joint program going on in Victoria and Queensland as well.

We also visited the golden guitar and scenic view.

Thanks to **Kristy** for giving us all the tours and **Lauren** for arranging everything and providing Rose and I with the service of eating whipped cream from our iced coffee.

by Asma Zia



Purpose:

- A placement activity to engage with industry partners and see a public breeding program gearing up for commercial operations. A really unique opportunity to see the program's evolution.
- Did you know - the GRDC has recently put the Program out for Tender seeking a commercial partner to take over operations.
- Meet **Kristy Hobson** the Chickpea breeder who has released many successful chickpea varieties and has incredible knowledge of the germplasm, the Australian areas of production and export markets.
- See chickpea field trials - these are small plots they are BIG operations!
- Practice communication!



IMAGES: LAUREN DUFALL



IMAGE: ROSE ZHANG

Chickpea Breeding Program Visit and Tamworth Agricultural institute

At the Breeza field site, we observed a **chickpea heat tolerance field trial in action**. In the northern chickpea growing regions of Australia, heat stress often coincides with drought stress during the grain-filling stage, with negative impacts on yield. While we (as research students) might traditionally use a temperature-controlled glasshouse to investigate heat tolerance traits in chickpea, large-scale field trials certainly can't do the same.

It was fascinating to learn about their alternative approach - candidate chickpea varieties were planted at two dates, around one month apart. Chickpeas in the earlier planting date served as a "control" treatment whilst chickpeas in the later planting date would be exposed to a greater number of high temperature days & nights later in the year, generating a "heat stress" treatment. These trials were being monitored via hyper-spectral drone measurements - this technology allows for the collection of multiple different plant traits at regular intervals throughout the growing season, highly efficient!

It was super exciting to see these chickpea field trials and we learnt about how experiments which may be straightforward in a laboratory setting require some out-of-the-box approaches when undertaken at a field scale. Thanks to Kristy and everyone at Chickpea Breeding Australia.

by Rose Zhang



IMAGE: ROSE ZHANG



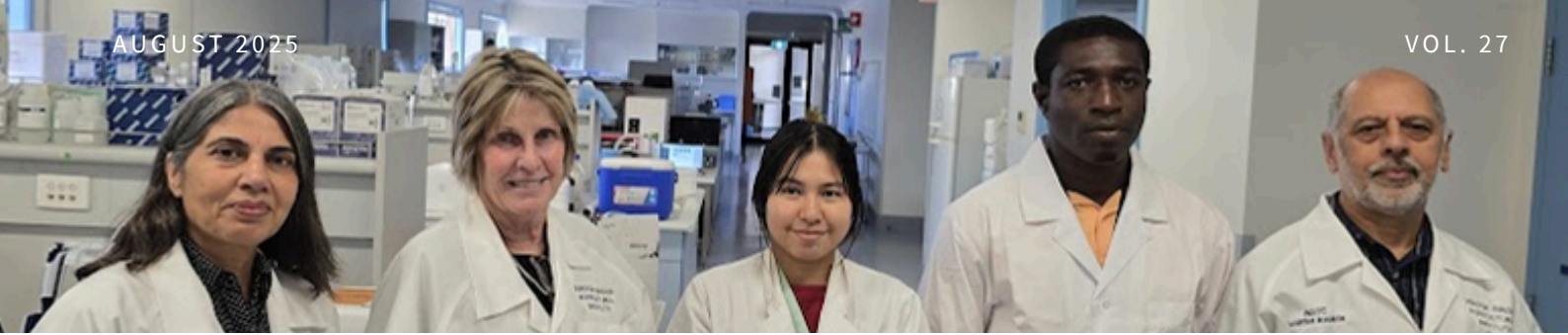
IMAGE: LAUREN DUFALL



IMAGES: LAUREN DUFALL



THANKS ASMA AND ROSE FOR THE EARLY WRITE UP AND PLEASE STAY TUNED FOR A FULL PIECE ON THE CENTRES WEBSITE SHARING OUR LEARNINGS FROM THIS VISIT



Improving Chickpea Productivity by Enhancing Resistance to Soil Acidity

By Edward Asare

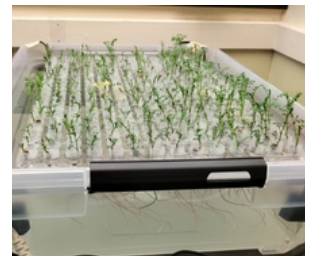
Chickpea (*Cicer arietinum* L.) is an important annual legume crop cultivated in crop rotation systems and offers several nutritional and health benefits. Beyond providing a healthy food source, incorporating chickpea into crop rotations offers significant agricultural advantages: it naturally improves soil fertility by fixing atmospheric nitrogen. This reduces production and inputs costs by minimising the need for nitrogenous fertiliser use in successive crops, thereby fostering sustainable agriculture. Australia stands as the world's leading chickpea exporter, with production primarily concentrated in the northern Australian grain belts.

There is a growing interest in expanding cultivation to Western Australia and Southern New South Wales. However, the widespread prevalence of soil acidity in these regions present a major obstacle due to chickpea's extreme sensitivity to acidic soils. Unfortunately, domestication and selective breeding of chickpea have narrowed its genetic diversity, resulting in a bottleneck that complicates the development of acid-tolerant varieties. The wild relatives of chickpea are valuable genetic resources as depository of untapped genetic diversity, which includes potential tolerance to both abiotic and biotic stressors. Harnessing this genetic variation from wild *Cicer* species is essential for chickpea's genetic improvement.

This research aims to explore a genetic solution for improving chickpea's tolerance to acidic soils. To achieve this goal, we are screening ~320 *C. reticulatum* and *C. echinospermum* accessions sourced from the Australian Grains GenBank (AGG) for soil acidity tolerance under hydroponics, glasshouse, and field conditions, using root and shoots traits. We have performed whole-genome genotyping using genotyping-by-sequencing (GBS). The genotypic and phenotypic data from the accessions are being analysed for trait-marker association via genome-wide association studies (GWAS) to identify putative candidate gene(s) regulating acid soil tolerance. To confirm their roles, the candidate gene(s) will be functionally characterised using genetic transformation methods in a commercial chickpea variety (HatTrick). In order to expand chickpea production to Western Australia and Southern New South Wales, a marker-assisted breeding pipeline will eventually be established to introduce characterised gene(s) into commercial chickpea cultivars. This will strengthen Australia's chickpea industry and its contribution to global food security.



Scoring the accessions for root and shoot traits.



Wild Cicer Species growing under hydroponic system



Growing the lines under glasshouse conditions

Edward's project was featured recently in [The Land](#) "Legume variety that controls disease and thrives in acidic soils on the way" (updated June 2 2025)

Back in the field

By Stuart Roy



1

New season



Training

staff/students in DIR licences for growing GMO/GE at Rosedale

Mel trained/retrained us in license DIR201, which we a planting under this year, and DIR 186, where we are still doing post harvest monitoring.



We get training for working at SARDI's farm, which includes handling GMO large animals.

3

Happy bunch of sowers!

This year's trials going in at Rosedale. This year we're joined by PhD students from Lee Hickey's ARC ITTC Centre for Predictive Breeding who have some SDN-1 barley in the ground.

2

Keep the planting area clean



Preparing the soil



Conferences

International Conference Presentations, Europe

by Ava Wilkinson

Over two weeks in June, I had the opportunity to present my research at the **Naples Forum on Service in Sorrento, Italy**, and participate in the **Doctoral Workshop**. This was an incredible event for service researchers, with the theme “**Care in Markets.**” I presented my research proposal titled “**Transforming Markets for Future Crop Technologies**” during the doctoral workshop, followed by small mentoring groups where we received feedback from both students and senior academics. I was fortunate to receive enthusiastic and encouraging feedback, particularly on the relevance of our Centre’s work and its strong connections with industry. There were also some great sessions including a career panel and keynote presentations.

Later in the week, I **presented my first paper** at the main conference, focusing on defining the conceptual domain of market-shaping, an important step as we look to support industry partners and practitioners in applying these ideas. The presentation was well received and sparked a really engaged Q&A session. Sorrento was a stunning location, and it was great to connect with researchers over dinners and informal chats throughout the week.

The following week, I attended the **Interdisciplinary Market Studies Workshop in Stockholm, Sweden**, which began with a design workshop and welcome reception. I presented **two projects** here: one exploring vision building in the market for future crop technologies, particularly in relation to overcoming historical controversy around GM/GE; and another collaborative piece (with a fellow student from the University of Adelaide) examining vision building in women’s entrepreneurial ecosystems. Both presentations generated thoughtful discussion and positive feedback, particularly on the crop technologies project, where many of the questions focused on our plans for longitudinal data collection, which was great validation of our approach.

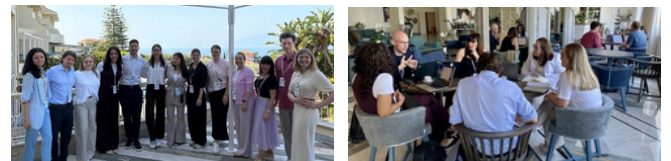
Reflecting on this conference, I emphasised in my presentation how valuable it is to be part of a Centre that is truly interdisciplinary.

The event encouraged broader thinking, and many participants were interested in the Centre and our current projects, which was a great opportunity to showcase our work.

Both events were incredibly enriching, providing valuable feedback, fresh perspectives, and new connections across disciplines. A huge thank you to the Centre for the support that helped make this possible. I hope everyone enjoyed the retreat, the photos looked fantastic!



IMAGES: AVA WILKINSON



A few key themes stood out to me from the conference. One particularly compelling idea was around “care in markets.”

Rather than simply responding to symptoms, the theme emphasised the need to change the conditions that create exclusion or harm in the first place. Transformative care encourages us to embed empathy into systems and use our research to drive inclusive, lasting change.

Another surprising and thought-provoking presentation looked at how we can learn from other species to better understand our markets. A quote that stuck with me was, “We need to evolve from being good stewards of nature to become better students of nature.” It really made me reflect on how, in crop sciences, we often focus on managing or modifying nature but we can also look to learn from it more deeply. Also, there was a fascinating discussion on reconceptualising markets. What surprised me most was the use of quantum mechanics as a lens, particularly the idea of markets as quantum social wavefunctions. Murphy’s 2021 article, “Markets are constantly collapsing: Reconceptualizing ‘the market’ as a quantum social wavefunction,” was mentioned, and it offered a really fresh and complex way of thinking about market dynamics.

So overall, the conference really challenged some of my assumptions and opened up new ways of thinking about market systems.

IMAGE: NIC VEVERS

Gordon Research Conferences

by Sadia Majeed

I recently had the incredible opportunity to attend the **Gordon Research Conference (GRC) and Gordon Research Seminar (GRS) in the USA** (8–13 August, Maine), where I presented both a poster and a talk on my PhD research, *Improving canola productivity by enhancing photosynthesis and resource partitioning*.

Giving a talk at such a major international conference was a huge milestone for me—and it went even better than I could have imagined. Despite being the last talk of the day, I received seven thoughtful questions from the audience. I was honestly overwhelmed by the response, particularly as my work focused on a less-explored aspect of photosynthesis: pods. Many participants commented that this angle offered a fresh and important perspective.

The feedback and interactions I received were invaluable. After my presentation, I had inspiring discussions with several leading researchers who shared excellent suggestions, expressed interest in collaboration, and highlighted exciting directions for future work. These conversations also opened up potential opportunities for postdoctoral research and broader international connections.

A particular highlight for me was receiving thoughtful questions from some of the most highly respected scientists in the field, which opened new avenues of research for my project. The Gordon Research Conference fostered such an interactive and discussion-rich environment that every session felt like a platform for discovery, reflection, and growth.

Overall, the GRC and GRS were not only fantastic opportunities to present my work but also to connect with potential collaborators, explore future career pathways, and gain fresh insights into global photosynthesis research. The experience has broadened my vision for the future and reinforced the value of my PhD research.



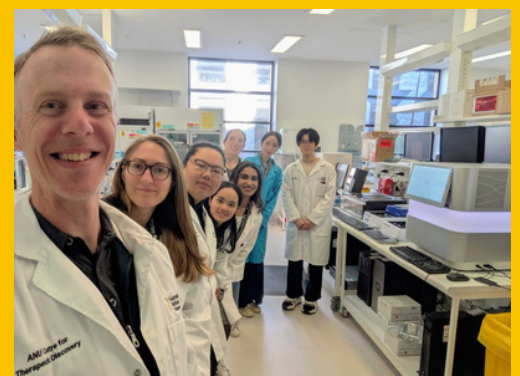
IMAGES: SADIA MAJEED

I am sincerely grateful to my supervisors for their continuous guidance, to the ARC Centre for Future Crops Development for awarding me a travel grant, and to the GRC organisers for providing partial registration reimbursement. This generous support made it possible for me to attend and fully benefit from such an enriching international experience.

Visit to BRF, Canberra

A small group from ANU visited the **Biomolecular Resource Facility (BRF, part of BPA)** and toured the facility and discussed the finer points of sequencing, the challenges, the successes and how we can work together to improve services for everyone.

Thanks to BRF staff for their time and openness and Derek for organising.





AUSTRALASIAN PLANT BREEDING CONFERENCE

Australasian Plant Breeding Conference, Perth

by Zuzana Plšková and Rebeccah Tyrrell

DAY 1

The conference started with a talk by **David Chagne** doing research on native trees in New Zealand. He talked about **considerations for the Maori communities**, collaborating with them, and being respectful of their rights. It was one of the two talks in the first two days (from the ones I have attended) that did the acknowledgment of country before the presentation. He spoke about dealing with genetic data that came from working with the indigenous people ([Biocultural Labels](#)). He also mentioned how important it is to consider where the data repositories are (where the servers are located), and what would happen if you lost access.

This talk was followed by an update on the **GRDC investments** from **Jessica Hyles**, talking about increasing funding of 15 million AUD per year for the rest of the GRDC RD&E plan (2023-2028). She mentioned tenders and other funding opportunities, such as direct negotiation, EOIs, workshop funding, and proof of concept (worth up to 250K). There was a lot of emphasis on the GRDC strategic pillars and directions, highlighting the nitrogen-use efficiency, plasticity for multiple stresses, gene technologies targeting soil constraints; plant pathology was identified as one of the gaps in grains research.

There was also a talk from **Digby Grows** (the King's Park botanic gardens) about **breeding native plants** and making them more attractive to insects and buyers, while trying to improve stress resilience and making sure some species don't disappear. They are sold as ornamental plants in Australia, South Africa, Europe etc, but the indigenous involvement was not so clear.

Lots of other talks included statistical analysis and models which were very well explained (although some still beyond my comprehension). My personal favourite quote came from a talk about parthenocarpy in pears: "and then we discovered that it was some wonky genetics going on" – I'm sure many researchers can relate.

DAY 2

Best thing about Day 2 was the morning discussions and the poster session in the evening. First there was a panel with **three speakers – farmers/breeders specialised in crops, citruses, and pastures**. The discussion revolved around what traits farmers look for, what's missing on the market, what's the financial impact of growing the new better varieties, how the research shaped the market in the past 40 years, and the accessibility of "new crops" – it used to be mainly wheat, barley and canola, but now we get quite a lot of chickpea, lentils, sorghum etc, and there are many other profitable crops that grow well in Australia. It was interesting to see **comparisons between short-term and long-term crops**, and the decision-making process that farmers go through when deciding whether and which new varieties to grow.

After the panel, we joined a **workshop on IP and PBR**. We got a brief summary of the IP Australia's PBR reform presented by **Isabel Ward** (IP Australia), and a suggestion for a **policy update from Tress Walmsley** (InterGrain, Australian Crop Breeders), proposing that the grain traders/domestic users would need a license to purchase grain varieties that attract an EPR. This was followed by case studies on PBR apple varieties from **Daniel Taylor** (DPIRD), showing the trademarking of the Bravo apples (Soluna outside of Australia) and how difficult it is to prosecute people who do not care about PBR and sell the apples on Facebook or similar.

DAY 3

Overall, many of the talks presented large-scale projects, most of which took years to complete or are still ongoing. We were given a **broad overview of breeding efforts across a wide range of crops**, including wheat, barley, sorghum, chickpea, canola, strawberries, papaya, citruses, apples, avocados, macadamia nuts, sandalwood, clovers, and others.

The scale of data generated and processed was very impressive, showing the importance of scientific collaborations. We were very fortunate to attend the conference, **thanks to InterGrain!**

My favourite quote of the day: "Bumblebees are actually better crossers than PhD students".





Mary, Florence, Arslan, Anu, Reshma, Sadia, Nay Chi and Tony recently attended the 2025 Australian Brassica Conference in Horsham.



IMAGE: ARSLAN MAHMOOD

Congratulations to Sadia who received the **Phil Salisbury Best Student Presentation Award** for her outstanding PhD research presentation. This award includes a \$500 prize.

I am truly honoured and delighted to have received the Phil Salisbury Best Student Presentation Award at the 2025 Australian Brassica Conference in Horsham (21-23 July). This recognition for my PhD research means a lot to me, and I am deeply grateful to my supervisors, colleagues, and the ARC Centre for Future Crops Development for their constant support and encouragement. Winning this award, has motivated me even more to continue working passionately in my research journey. Thank you to everyone who has been part of this milestone!

— Sadia

On the 22nd of July, I presented my part of a PhD work at the Australian Brassica Conference (ABC) 2025, which is held once every two years. It was held at Grains Innovation Park, Horsham, Victoria.

I received many questions and compliments from industry and university people. Everyone seemed excited about my PhD project because of the gene-editing deployment.

The good thing about the ABC is the interaction and networking sessions for students with industry and growers. The second-best thing is the presentations, which give you tons of knowledge about canola.

On the last day of the conference, they gave a facility tour, which included blackleg screening assays, high-throughput automatic misted glasshouses for canola disease screening and the Australian Grains Genebank (AGG). Moreover, after the conference, we also visited the Nufarm Innovation Centre and their facilities.

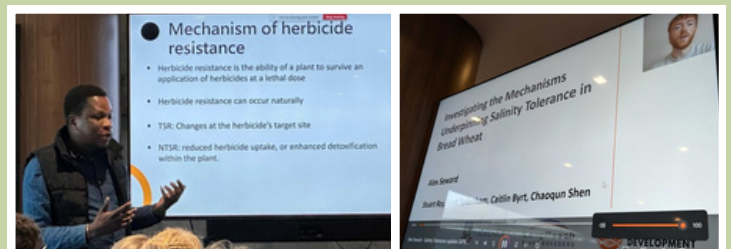
— Arslan

IMAGES: ARSLAN MAHMOOD



Longreach Plant Breeders

Excellent talks from **Ola and Alex** (well virtual recorded Alex) at the Longreach Plant Breeders.



IMAGES: OLA AMOO & JENNY MORTIMER

Student Milestones

Congratulations to Yiting Xie

We are excited to share that Yiting is the **first PhD student in our Centre to submit his thesis** – what an incredible achievement!

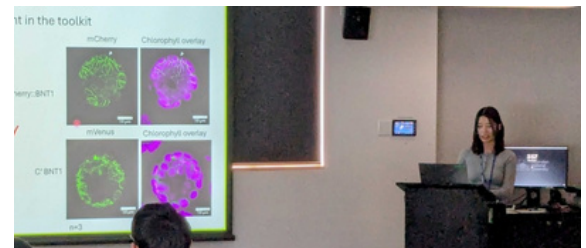
He'll be sharing more about his journey in the next newsletter, so stay tuned!



Natalie Tsang recently gave her exit seminar at ANU – an important milestone that takes place about three months before thesis submission.

'Harnessing Synthetic Biology for Retrograde Signalling in Plants'

Congratulations to Natalie on reaching this stage of her PhD journey!



Alongside Yiting and Natalie, several more of our PhD students are preparing to submit their theses soon. We look forward to celebrating their achievements in the coming months!



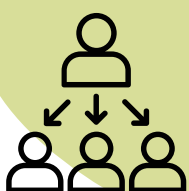
Congratulations to **Asma Zia** who had her Confirmation of Candidature!!!!

'Developing Nanotechnology Enabled CRISPR Gene Editing in Chickpea'

Student representatives

Welcome to **Asma** and **Ola**, the first Centre Student Representatives!

They will be **the voice** of your student cohort, ensuring that students' perspectives, concerns, and suggestions are heard and considered in decision-making processes.



- Have a say in how your training and research are supported.
- Help shape the future of the Training Centre to better meet student needs.
- Gain insight into academic decision-making and governance.
- Make a positive impact for your peers.

To Edit or Not To Edit?

By Michail Ivanov



On 11 August, I had the pleasure of sharing the Adelaide UniBar stage with **Emily, Jenny, Joan, Stu and Alex** as part of our Science Week ‘**The Future of Agricultural Crops: To Edit or Not to Edit**’ debate on genome editing (GE). Regrettably, the drums were taken off the stage before we started, so it was more a debate than the talent show it could’ve otherwise been. Nevertheless, it proved an **informative and entertaining night**. Emily’s organisation and hosting was most appreciated, as was Stu’s great succinct summary on GE and what it entails. We then engaged in the debate (Jenny and I on the ‘Yes to GE’ side and Joan and Alex on the ‘No to GE’ side), which proved challenging at times as it required some brain work, which, by 6pm on a Monday is a tough ask.

It was a **good opportunity for us to test our science communication skills** and present views which aren’t necessarily ones we would otherwise hold, but which are pertinent to our research. And, of course, it was a great opportunity for me to catch up the Waite team. Likewise, it was a pleasure, as always, to see Joan who is otherwise hard at work in the nation’s cold capital. At the conclusion of the event, the audience voted that the ‘**Yes to GE**’ team had won. In a sense, however, we were all winners (though some greater than others; i.e., Jenny and I).

We had a number of researchers and postgraduate students in the audience who seemed quite engaged by the debate (I would attribute that to our exceptionally engaging demeanour). The event was good not only insofar as it provided some nuanced perspectives on GE and the arguments in favour of and against its use, but also as a socialising opportunity (or, to use a term I more so detest – a networking opportunity). It gave us, the panellists, an opportunity to talk to the attendees about our own research after the conclusion of the event and greet some familiar faces. **A successful Science Week event and, above all, a great Training Centre initiative.**

Working together



On 20 August, the ACT node hosted an event as part of National Science Week: **Exploring the future of agriculture together**. At the program, we had two excellent speakers: **Noah Smith, a Gomeroi person**, and **Kai Chan** from our Centre.

Noah shared insights into his culture and demonstrated traditional tools used for fishing, digging yams, and hunting kangaroos, as well as showcasing large emu eggs. He explained how his people live with the Land, respect it, and adapt their lifestyle according to the seasons. He also gave us a “tour”, just a 100-metre walk, pointing out **significant native plants used by First Nations** people for food, tools and medicine. We could have listened to him for hours!

To complement his talk, we were catered by an Aboriginal-owned business serving **bushfood**. Wondering what that included? Think crocodile hot dogs, kangaroo and emu sausage rolls, gyoza, Warrigal green puffs, sweet potato quinoa bites, and lemon myrtle or Davidson plum muffins. The food disappeared quickly—I didn’t even get the chance to take a photo or try any myself!

Kai then explained his project on **cultural burning practices**, developed in close collaboration with **Paul Girrawah House**, who many of you will remember from our recent annual meeting.

We were delighted that the event drew participants from outside our School, including First Nations students, librarians, and colleagues from the Department of Agriculture. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with comments like “**please do it again!**”

Spotlight

Lucy Darragh is spending a couple of days each week in Canberra at the moment, meeting with people and **conducting interviews** as part of her PhD research.

Lucy's project is exploring how Australian-based researchers shape the development, application and communication of biotechnology (including both traditional and emerging approaches), with a particular focus on the different factors that influence innovation. Working closely with her participants, the aim is to **generate more interdisciplinary understanding and discussion** of the implications both for and because of biotechnology, and to **shift the conversation beyond adversarial debate** toward more meaningful dialogue that addresses both the science and the complex realities in which biotechnology is developed and used.

If you are interested in sharing your experiences and perspectives, please feel free to reach out to [Lucy](#) directly.



IMAGE: NIC VEVERS



CEPLAS III proposal "SMART Plants in Dynamic Environments" successful in Excellence Strategy.

Read more [here](#)! PLUS stay tuned as Reshma Roy will be visiting CEPLAS early September.

See you around??

Just to prove that every page of our newsletter is dedicated to big and important news including the last...

Spencer Whitney has taken a Voluntary Separation from the ANU. However, don't fret - we will still see Spencer around and at future Centre events! The voluntary separation was effective from July however Spencer will take up an Emeritus position and until otherwise advised will continue formal roles with the Centre.

Barry Pogson has also taken a Voluntary Separation from the ANU, although not effective until 1 Jan 2026. Barry will also continue as Emeritus and will continue to supervise students. Let's be honest, no one believes that Barry will really be giving up anything.... :)

For now - catch them when you can!!

Other news

Some welcome support for ECRs in a revision of the **Australian Research Council's** proposal for the National Competitive Grants Program. The Training Centre made a submission highlighting this issue - see more [here](#).

Caitlyn Byrt spoke to [ABC Radio](#) about growing plants on the moon.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Australian Society for Plant Scientist conference
24 -27 November 2025 - Adelaide
+ stay tuned for a mini Centre get together alongside

Dates to be set for next Centre Training Retreat and Annual Meeting
Additional optional Communications Training AusSMC Canberra February 2026

Are there any conferences coming up that you think your Centre colleagues would like to know about? Let us know [here](#).