PRESS RELEASE

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PEAS AND BEANS STEP INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

The ARC Centre of Excellence for Integrative Legume Research (CILR) launches its innovative one-week teacher professional development program this week.

“STEP IN LABS!” (Science Teachers Education Partnership IN Legumes And Biotechnology Studies) was developed in partnership with Education Queensland as part of the Queensland Government's Spotlight on Science initiative.

It consists of an extensive series of lectures and workshops designed to educate high school teachers on the cutting-edge techniques used in plant science.

Eleven teachers from Queensland secondary schools as far way as Goondiwindi and Thuringowa (near Townsville) are taking part in the program.

The CILR’s Director Professor Peter Gresshoff said the program aims to show teachers the sophistication of plant biotechnology research.

“We hope the teachers will be inspired by this experience and take their enthusiasm back to the classroom.”

“We would like to see more students undertaking tertiary studies in plant biology,” Professor Gresshoff said.

CILR’s Chief Operating Officer Ian Harris said that many people did not realise the large impact that plant science had on their everyday lives.

“Legumes such as peas, beans, peanuts and clover do not need nitrogen fertiliser because of their symbiotic relationship with soil bacteria called rhizobia.”

“Our research provides fundamental insights into helping the environment.”

“In addition, we have recently identified legumes as a potential source of therapeutics to treat a range of human diseases, and as promising candidates for biodiesel production,” Mr Harris said.

The CILR is a research network of plant scientists conducting high quality, cutting-edge research into legumes and other plant species. The centre was established in 2003 with a $10 million Australian Research Council (ARC) grant.

Legumes are major crop plants that are important in human food, animal feed, vegetable oil and nutraceutical production. They add nitrogen to the soil and do not need nitrogen fertiliser because of their ability to form symbioses with bacteria that convert atmospheric nitrogen into proteins. Worldwide crop production and fertiliser replacement benefits of legumes exceed A$200 billion per annum (A$2 billion per annum in Australia alone).

For interview:
Ian Harris 0402 107 561 (CILR-related issues)
Dr Stephanie Williams 0419 677 041 (CILR’s educational issues)