

## India, Oz sign agreement to boost Horticulture research

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Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a Public Sector Enterprise of Government of India, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Horticulture Innovation Australia (Hort Innovation) for launching a joint funding call to support Research and Development (R&D) organizations and other eligible entities to undertake novel and cutting-edge strategic translational research in horticulture at affordable costs.

The event took place at the Australian High Commission in New Delhi and was presided over by H E Ms Harinder Sidhu, Australian High Commissioner to India, and Prof K VijayRaghavan, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Government of India.

As stated by Prof VijayRaghavan, Secretary, DBT & Chairman, BIRAC. "BIRAC's vision is to stimulate and enhance the strategic research and innovation capabilities of the Indian biotech industry, particularly start-ups and SME's, for the creation of affordable products addressing the needs of the largest section of society. Considering the gap between demand and supply for crops, it is of paramount importance to stimulate an enabling environment for research and development in both the regions. Through the signing of this MoU today, we along with Hort Innovation aim to create a supportive 'innovation ecosystem' for researchers to undertake high-level research and promote horticulture techniques."

The focus of the joint call is to undertake horticultural research in order to develop and deploy modern tools of plant biotechnology to improve crop productivity.

The funding commitment from BIRAC and Hort Innovation is up to AUD 6 million over a period of 3 years.

"Encouraging and fostering research and development of innovative interventions and practices that ensure sustenance can go a long way in improving livelihoods and the quality of life. We, at Hort Innovation have made it our mission to increase the productivity, farm gate profitability and global competitiveness of Australia's horticulture industries and now through this partnership want to extend the same knowledge and support to horticulture industries in India to improve their productivity and competitiveness. India has been a centre of innovation and research as far as horticultural practices are concerned and

we are pleased that our collaboration with BIRAC will allow for the exchange of skills, knowledge and information between horticulturalists of both the regions," said Mr David Moore, General Manager of Research Marketing and Investment, Hort Innovation.

The MoU was signed by Dr Renu Swarup, Senior Adviser, DBT & Managing Director, BIRAC and David Moore, on behalf of their respective organizations.

The event was attended by participants from both the Indian and the Australian delegation.

"India has encouraged projects relating to the establishment of commercial production units in open field as well as under protected conditions and projects on Post harvest Management and primary processing of products. In Hort Innovation, we have found the perfect ally to conduct cutting-edge research in the area of Horticulture. This strategic partnership will undoubtedly promote the development of cost effective practices for crop harvesting. Creativity and innovative practices in an agrarian economy like India will have far reaching impact on its socio-economic progress," said Dr Renu Swarup.