SUMMARY HISTORY OF CROPS FOR THE FUTURE

Crops for the Future - the world's only research and development centre solely devoted to underutilised but potentially important food, medicinal and industrial crops - has been established through a progression of developments. These began in 1989 when recognising that the food and nutritional security of the burgeoning global population was reliant on less than a dozen food staples, a *Centre for Underutilised Crops* was established at the University of Southampton in the UK. This was then expanded in 1992 with support from the UK Government to become the *International Centre for Underutilised Crops* (ICUC) – still located at the same University. Although the Centre had established active collaborative networks for research and capacity development on underutilised crops in Asia, the Pacific region, Africa and Latin America, the UK government as the sole funder at that time, considered it more appropriate that the Centre should be based in a developing country, and commissioned a review to identify a location and possible hosting arrangement to provide a venue and support services.

The review led to ICUC being re-located to Sri Lanka in 2005 where the Centre had existing R&D linkages, and where it could be provided with office accommodation and support services by the CGIAR's *International Water Management Institute* (IWMI). This arrangement was subject to further review after a 5 year-period.

In 2009, given their overlapping roles, the decision was taken to merge ICUC with the *Global Facilitation Unit for Underutilised Crops* (GFU) – an entity that was established in 2002 through the *Global Forum for Agricultural Research (*GFAR) and hosted by the CGIAR centre known as *Bioversity International*. With the merger, it was decided to rename the new organisation: *Crops for the Future* (CFF) and following an international call for expressions of interest in hosting the new global entity, the decision was taken for it to be co-hosted in Malaysia by the Asia, Pacific, Oceania office of *Bioversity International* and the *University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus* (UNMC) which had company status in Malaysia (*University of Nottingham in Malaysia Sdn. Bhd* - UNiM). The Centre was relocated from Sri Lanka to Malaysia in 2010.

CFF's role was global advocacy and the collation and dissemination of knowledge on underutilised crops for food and non-food uses. Although work was commissioned in other parts of the world, CFF used UNMC as its principal research arm. To provide this research arm with independent legal status, *Crops for the Future Research Centre* (CFFRC) was established in 2011 as a company limited by guarantee and without share capital, which enabled it to secure funding from the Government of Malaysia (GoM) and to undertake collaborative research on underutilised crops with Malaysian research organisations such as the Malaysian Research & Development Institute (MARDI).

The two guarantors of CFFRC were GoM and UNiM, and the former provided a 7-year grant of MYR120 million (approximately US$40 million) to CFFRC for its development and operational costs, while the University of Nottingham (UoN) provided CFFRC with access to physical resources and expertise at its campuses in Malaysia (UNMC), the UK and China.

One further development took place in 2014, and this was to combine CFF and CFFRC into a single larger entity, which, while still retaining the 'brand' name, *Crops for the Future,* combined the research function with that for advocacy and knowledge collation and dissemination. CFFRC was

retained as an entity to provide governance, legal, contractual and various other functions, but with end of the agreed period of support from GoM, CFFRC was closed in May 2020.

Over the past 9-year period between 2011 and 2020, CFF's achievements have been very significant and using internationally accepted standards for accessing research performance, it has had much higher ratings than all Malaysian research organisations was on par with the international CGIAR research centres that are far larger and have very significant human and financial resources. This performance was recognised by the alliance of seven of the world's most significant agricultural research centres, known as the Association of International Research Centres for Agriculture (AIRCA), in requesting CFF to act as its Chair. It also provides CFF with a sound platform for its forthcoming initiative to establish itself as the world's most significant research organisation solely devoted to underutilised crops for food, feed, medicine and industry.

In 2020, CFF moved back to the UK (legally, as Crops for the Future (UK) CIC; registered at Companies House, No. 12501585) as a not-for-profit community interest company and is now hosted by NIAB, 93 Lawrence Weaver Road, Cambridge, CB3 0LG, UK.

Since transfer to UK in March 2020, CFF has secured:

- RADIANT: an H2020 project which started on 1st September 2021 -August 31st 2025. This evaluates underutilized crops and aims to develop dynamic value chains for them in Europe.

- Plant Breeders without Borders (2019 – 2023), funded by Bayer Corporate Social Responsibility and led by Mr Anthony Leddin, a plant breeder from Australia. This aims to work with local communities worldwide to develop inclusive plant breeding of minor crops, starting with Bambara groundnut as an exemplar. [activities currently on hold due to Covid-19]

- LANDSUPPORT (2021-2022): CFF will complete work started by CFFRC in Malaysia, with the further development of a policy tools for land-use in Europe.

With the immediate future of CFF secure, we are now exploring how to expand the CFF approach globally, with the aim to establish 'CFF nodes' (independent, but allied) in a number of countries, with the most advanced currently being established in South Africa with hosting by the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Pietermaritzberg (contact Prof Tafadwanashe Mabhaudhi; mabhaudhi@ukzn.ac.za) and initial exploration underway in Australia (contact: Prof Graham King; Graham.King@SCU.edu.au)

The aim is to develop regional centres with complementary expertise who would contribute to a wide range of food system research globally.