



News release

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Heavy metal medal winner as soil research hits pay dirt



Explaining how plants take up cadmium from the soil has earned Adelaide's Professor Mike McLaughlin the top annual prize in Australian soil science.

CSIRO's Professor McLaughlin was awarded the J.A. Prescott Medal at Adelaide on September 21 for his work explaining how crops take up the heavy metal.

The Prescott Medal is awarded annually by the Australian Society of Soil Science to a person 'who has made an outstanding contribution to soil science'.

Professor McLaughlin undertook research to demonstrate the links between soil salinity and

cadmium. His research has been verified around the globe.

He then went on to develop ways to control cadmium accumulation in food crops. His research was published in leading international journals, and turned into practical advice for growers through Australia's National Cadmium Minimisation Strategy.

The benefits from this research to Australian horticulture alone were valued at \$11.4m in 1998.

Additional work has since been completed on a much wider range of crops. As a result, cadmium is no longer a critical issue in Australian agricultural soils.

Professor McLaughlin has also worked on sustainability issues relating to wastewater and sewage biosolids disposal on soils, with a focus on metals and phosphorus.

He has also studied acidic soils and fertiliser reactions in soils, with a focus on phosphorus and fluoride.

He has been developing new ways to measure and understand the behaviour of inorganic elements in soils, including impacts on human and ecosystem health.

His current work looks at developing and applying new techniques to measure and monitor soil-borne nutrients and pollutants, and remediation of contaminated soils.

The medal committee reported: "Professor McLaughlin's career shows that he has contributed significantly to the understanding of inorganic element behaviour in soils. Not only has he contributed as an academic to soil science, but also shown commitment to the advances in soils science within an applied context and as well as extension."

Last October he received three prestigious awards at the joint annual meeting of the US societies of agronomy, soil science, geology and crop science held in Houston, Texas. These awards recognise people outside the US who have made outstanding achievements to soil science through education, research, and national and international service.

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