The farmers need help. They could spray the plots heavily with pesticides but would rather not. They are expensive and can cause other environmental problems further down the track.

Instead, they consider an integrated pest management program which they’ve heard about but until now have had no reason to investigate.

The farmers discover that Australian researchers have done a lot of work in this area and can offer sound, practical advice on how to deal with the problem.

They learn about a new Australian website which contains a wealth of information about agricultural issues and research.

With assistance from officials, they log on to the website, track down the relevant details and use the information to help rid their gardens of the caterpillar pest.

Their harvest is spared from widespread destruction because the farmers had quick and easy access to good quality advice.

Such a scenario in one of the world’s poorest nations is no longer necessarily fanciful thanks to new information and computer technologies.

In Australia, a new website is being set up so that developing countries can have access to the latest research and to services in agriculture, health and distance education and e-learning.

The new website is called the Australian Development Gateway. It is part of the Australian Government’s commitment under the Virtual Colombo Plan to provide developing countries with affordable and widespread access to Australian knowledge and expertise.

The Gateway is part of an overall objective by the Development Gateway Foundation in New York to encourage the world-wide sharing of information and knowledge on sustainable development and poverty reduction. Australia will contribute $10 million over the next three years to the Foundation to support this objective. EJ