

FIRST AGRITECH GRANT WILL SUPPORT AITUTAKI DREAMING TO INCREASE SUSTAINABLE FOOD PRODUCTION

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce its first grant under the Government's SMART AgriTech Scheme will go to Aitutaki Dreaming Limited to fund expansion of their 'Ootu Aquaponics' aquaponics system. The Ootu Aquaponics system enables Aitutaki Dreaming to grow fish and fresh produce without the need for soil, fertilisers or insecticides, and with less than two per cent of the water used in conventional farming.

In signing the Grant approval today, Financial Secretary Garth Henderson commented on how innovative systems like Ootu Aquaponics can help drive transformational change in the agricultural sector. "I'm delighted to be supporting Aitutaki Dreaming's expansion, which will support them to increase production and expand to supply fresh, local, sustainable produce into markets beyond their own local community. Aitutaki Dreaming have demonstrated how their aquaponics system enables more efficient and sustainable food production, directly supporting the core purpose of the AgriTech Scheme. The majority of our farming community are at grass roots community or household level, and the AgriTech Scheme is here to assist farmers to take that next step."

Aitutaki Dreaming co-owner Katrina Petero says: "The AgriTech grant will enable us to purchase additional materials to expand our existing Aquaponics system, which will allow us to increase our production and supply. We will now be able to expand our grow beds and existing systems to increase our production and supply of fresh, local and sustainable produce to our community. We

hope to eventually be able to also supply Rarotonga and other Pa Enua through this expansion."

The AgriTech Scheme provides grant funding to commercial farmers and/or agribusiness ventures to encourage investment in technology and smart processes, specifically to improve yield, efficiency, and profitability. To be successful, AgriTech Grant applications must meet a range of criteria including innovation, economic viability and consistency with biosecurity and other technical restrictions. While this might seem daunting for smaller businesses or startups, Ministry of Agriculture, Private Sector Task Force, Business Trade and Investment Board and MFEM staff are on hand to help applicants through the process.

MFEM encourages people wanting to apply for an AgriTech Grant to firstly read through the criteria carefully, then discuss their project with Ministry of Agriculture to ensure their project meets all the technical and legislative requirements. MFEM, PSTF and BTIB staff are also available to give applicants advice and feedback to ensure their application is in line with the SMART AgriTech Policy before it is submitted.

AgriTech Grants provide an opportunity for applicants to:

- Pursue new ideas that can transform a business or the agriculture industry through innovation and productivity improvements
- Respond to opportunities that are driven by innovative, new ideas or meeting new market needs
- Facilitate better connections between producers, processors and marketers
- Reduce farming's environmental footprint through new technology and more efficient processes assist in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

