

# AITUTAKI HYDROPONICS WINS A SMART AGRITECH GRANT TO EXPAND INTO RAROTONGA

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce it has approved a SMART AgriTech Scheme grant to enable Aitutaki Hydroponics to expand their farming business into Rarotonga. Through this expansion, Aitutaki Hydroponics aim to help meet the nation's growing appetite for fresh fruit and vegetables which is becoming difficult to grow in the outdoor tropical environment.

James of Aitutaki Hydroponics will use the Agritech grant to help fund construction of a new commercial greenhouse on land he has recently secured. The greenhouse will be used to grow and supply the local Rarotonga market with fruit and veges that continue to be imported in large quantities and have become increasingly popular but also expensive.



"In today's world, where climate changes unexpectedly and its impacts can be dev-

astating to our livelihoods, it is important food production is protected, says James. "A controlled greenhouse environment will provide security and confidence that food will grow in an environment with no impact from the climate variability, wind, rain, and pests. This ensures food production will increase in consistency, efficiency and always meet market demand," he says.

Growing crops in a controlled environment greenhouse increases consistency of crop quality and quantity, reduces the need for chemicals and improves local growers' ability to meet market demand throughout the year. Most importantly, this reduces the Cook Islands' reliance on imported crops from abroad, makes fresh healthy food more affordable, and keeps money within the local economy.

Agritech grants support investment in smart, productivity-enhancing agritech

and equipment to improve the commercial viability of agricultural businesses and the economic sustainability of the agricultural sector. Through the grants, Government aims to foster innovation by encouraging the development and adoption of more innovative and productive technologies across the agricultural supply chain.

