

# COOK ISLANDS VANILLA BUSINESS GETS BOOST FROM AGRITECH GRANT

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce it has awarded Nicholas Farm in Matavera a SMART AgriTech Scheme grant to pilot a new shade house irrigation system designed to improve the success of vanilla cultivation in the Cook Islands.

Vanilla plants need to be grown in a controlled environment providing the right temperature, humidity, and shade to optimise their growth and production. Nicholas farms' new pilot system will be designed to mimic the natural climate conditions that ensure vanilla plants thrive in the wild. The system will have a long lifespan of about 10 years and will eventually be run on solar power.



Conventional irrigation systems are not suitable for vanilla as the plants do not like too much water on their ground root system, and it can lead to fungal disease. The Nicholas Farm vanilla shade house will incorporate an automated mister and fogging irrigation system, to ensure just the right amount of water is delivered precisely when and to where the plants need it. This has the advantages of economising on water usage as well as effectively providing moisture to the plants' foliar and aerial root systems during the hot and dry periods.

Nicholas Farms' owner Luciana Nicholas says: "We are very grateful for the support of the Agritech grant, which has enabled us to go ahead with the pilot operation to verify the effectiveness of the shade house mister and fogging system. If proven successful, there are several other vanilla shade houses on Rarotonga, hydroponics and

flower houses that can utilise this concept to optimize growth and production, and therefore increase revenue."

By initiating and establishing this innovative pilot, Nicholas Farms are helping boost the commercial viability and economic sustainability of vanilla and other valuable crops in the Cook Islands.

