

Building a business case for investment in a coconut industry in the Pacific



Key details

Location

Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu

Duration

Start Mar 2021

End Oct 2021

Budget

AUD 149,967

Commissioned organisation

The University of Queensland

Partners

Fiji National University; Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, Samoa; Department of Industry, Vanuatu; Ministry of Agriculture, Fiji

Project Leader

Mr Cameron Turner, University of Queensland

Program

Horticulture

Project code

HORT/2020/190

LaunchPad methodology pioneered by Stanford University and the American National Science Foundation (NSF), this project will form a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to replanting, and develop potential solutions that overcome these barriers to the satisfaction of smallholders.

Against the backdrop of increasing demand for coconut, it is estimated that well over 50% of the 1.3 million coconut trees in the Pacific are 'senile' or 'unproductive'. The future of coconut production and the livelihoods it supports critically depends on replanting, which provides an opportunity not only to sustain production, but to increase it from its baseline through the introduction of higher yielding hybrids.

Despite ostensibly strong macroeconomic incentives to replant, research has consistently shown that "very little replanting has occurred [in the Pacific] in the last 3-4 decades". Understanding the reasons behind the "apparent disinterest" in replanting has been described as a "key question" in Pacific Island Countries (PIC) coconut research and development. If global demand for coconut is increasing, why, then, do we not see a corresponding increase to production in the Pacific?

While growing the PIC coconut industry requires solving immense technical challenges (e.g. eradicating or reducing the impact of key pests, producing and distributing quality planting material, offsetting the effects of climate change), it also requires us to solve distinctly human and behavioural puzzles. Unless we have an understanding of what's driving smallholder behaviour, and, critically, what's preventing coconut replanting, the real-world impact of technical achievements will be dampened.

Overview

This project aimed to form a sophisticated understanding of the barriers to coconut replanting, and develop potential solutions that overcome these barriers to the satisfaction of smallholders.

It is the 'human' element that is the focus of this project. Through the use of a Science-Based Lean

Project outcomes

- Developing a strong evidence-base for ACIAR on the viability (or otherwise) of the coconut industry in the Pacific.
- Building in-country capability in ethnographic research methodology.



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