



By Liam
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Fresh Del Monte funds Australian TR4 research



Research team that developed TR4-resistant banana variety partners with leading banana marketer

Fresh Del Monte has partnered with an Australian research team to fund the development of a new variety of Cavendish banana, resistant to Panama disease tropical race 4 (TR4).

The team at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), led by James Dale, has successfully developed a genetically modified TR4-resistant line of Cavendish banana.

Now Fresh Del Monte has engaged the researchers in a multi-million-dollar partnership to expand on their findings.

Dale said the funding would enable his research team to build on its research by using gene-editing CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) technology to now create a non-genetically modified variety of Cavendish, also resistant to TR4.

"While our success in developing a disease-resistant genetically modified line of Cavendish is a world-first achievement, this funding will enable us

to develop the next generation of TR4 resistant Cavendish bananas," said Dale.

Hans Sauter, chief sustainability officer and senior vice-president, research and development, agricultural services for Fresh Del Monte, said the company was addressing critical issues facing the banana industry as we speak.

"The ability to leverage the capabilities of the team at QUT is very exciting. We see the potential with these revolutionary technologies, and we are looking forward to putting these tools to work to solve real problems facing the world," Sauter said.

"Fresh Del Monte is proud to partner with a respected research university facility like QUT in this endeavour."

The team research is conducted in Brisbane, Australia at QUT's Centre for Agriculture and the Bioeconomy, with the confined field trials conducted on a La Manna Premier Group (LPG) joint venture banana farm outside Darwin in the Northern Territory.

Anthony Di Pietro, chief executive of LPG, said the company has been involved in TR4 resistance research with QUT since 2011. LPG and Australian Banana Research Pty co-funded the breakthrough TR4 resistance research and continues to support TR4 research at QUT.

"Fresh Del Monte joining with QUT to further progress the gene-editing banana resistance research is a positive move for both the industry worldwide and for Australian banana growers," Di Pietro said.

The Fresh Del Monte and QUT research collaboration is staged with multiple phases over the next five years, with the aim of developing novel commercial resistant banana variety releases.

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