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By Chris Komorek

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Hort Innovation wins R&D grant

The Australian organisation receives A$5m (US$3.4m) to continue researching better tree crop management and yield forecasting

Hort Innovation has been awarded the grant to continue its work optimising the management of Australian tree crop industries, including avocado, macadamia and mango while expanding to banana and citrus orchards.

The organisation will also aim to improve yield forecasting accuracy (pre-harvest), mapping tree health, fruit quality and maturity, and better detection and strategies to control future biosecurity threats.

This phase two grant is in addition to the initial support provided through the Australian government's Rural R&D for Profit programme. The phase one stage awarded Hort Innovation just under A$3.5m (US$2.4m) to begin its research.

Phase one delivered a national map of all commercial avocado, macadamia and mango orchards across Australia, providing the industry with an accurate understanding of the extent and distribution of production, as well as supporting improved biosecurity and post-disaster response.

It also identified a range of emerging technologies that supported more accurate yield and fruit quality forecasting and mapping as well as the improved monitoring of abiotic and biotic stresses at the individual tree and orchard level.

Minister for agriculture Bridget McKenzie said innovation and developing smarter farming practices will be vital if Australian agriculture is to grow to a A$100bn (US$69bn) industry by 2030.

"Ultimately, we want to see research reach the hands of farmers and funding the second phase of this project brings this innovation one step closer to use in our horticultural industries."

Hort Innovation general manager of extension and adoption, Dr Anthony Kachenko, said their research will assist growers in determining different areas of productivity within their orchards

"This information supports targeted agronomy and the more judicious application of orchard inputs such as fertiliser, pesticides and improved irrigation management."

"Additionally, accurate pre-harvest forecasts of yield, crop maturity and quality enable growers to make more informed decisions around harvesting logistics (labour, transport etc) as well as forward selling estimates" said Kachenko.

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