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By Matthew Jones

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Greenlight for Kiwifruit Breeding Centre

Joint venture between Plant & Food Research and Zespri will accelerate development of new varieties



(l-r): Zespri CEO Dan Mathieson and Plant & Food Research CEO David Hughes

New Zealand's Kiwifruit Breeding Centre will commence operations on 1 October (2021).

A 50/50 joint venture between Plant & Food Research and Zespri, the centre will focus on innovation within kiwifruit breeding. It has been tasked with creating healthier, better tasting and more sustainability-focused varieties.

"This is an exciting development for our industry and will allow us to extend New Zealand's position as the world's leading innovator in kiwifruit," said Zespri chief executive Dan Mathieson.

"The centre represents our commitment to broaden our efforts exploring promising new varieties within our research pipeline and bring these to our growers and consumers faster."

The Kiwifruit Breeding Centre will be based in Te Puke, as well as operating

out of Kerikeri, Motueka and Mt Albert. It will also have a presence in selected kiwifruit regions globally.

The proposal to create the centre was signposted in December 2020, and follows two years of due diligence. It has now received approval from the boards of Zespri and Plant & Food Research, as well as the shareholding ministers of Plant & Food Research.

The centre will be jointly funded by Plant & Food Research and Zespri, with the organisations sharing royalties from any future commercialised new varieties.

"It's a natural evolution of the hugely successful 30-year relationship between Zespri and Plant & Food Research which has delivered the world-leading SunGold Kiwifruit variety, alongside Zespri Red," said David Hughes, chief executive of Plant & Food Research. "This new venture will carry us further and faster."

Michael Ahie has been appointed chair of the Kiwifruit Breeding Centre's board. Ahie is chancellor of Massey University and a former chair of Plant & Food Research.

"This is another milestone moment for the New Zealand kiwifruit industry," Ahie said. "We are going to take our world-leading new cultivar development programme to the next level through the innovation of our people and increased investment by Zespri and Plant & Food Research."

"The Kiwifruit Breeding Centre is fantastic news for the New Zealand kiwifruit industry and everyone who is a part of it."

The Kiwifruit Breeding Centre board expects to appoint a chief executive in the coming month.

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