AgroSpectrum Envisaging Future | Updating Present ASIA

Zespri announce first three pilots from its new innovation fund, ZAG

12 June 2024 | News

The $2 million annual fund designed to attract innovative problem solvers to address key challenges in kiwifruit industry



The $2 million annual fund designed to attract innovative problem solvers to address key challenges in kiwifruit industry

New Zealand headquartered, Zespri has announced the first three pilots from its new innovation fund, ZAG. These pilots will focus on the colour of RubyRed kiwifruit, the tracking of kiwifruit bins, and the use of biochar on kiwifruit orchards.

ZAG has been designed to allow Zespri to accelerate its kiwifruit innovation work through broadening its efforts through collaborating with global innovators, with an impressive range of ideas submitted from around the world. The $2 million annual fund launched late last year is designed to attract innovative problem solvers to help address some of the key challenges the industry faces as it meets the growing demand for kiwifruit.

An Innovation Steering Committee chaired by Zespriâ??s Chief Marketing, Innovation and Sustainability Officer Jiunn Shih has been evaluating ideas submitted by prospective solution providers which support projects that are focused on four core priorities for Zespri: (1) Initiatives that are good for kiwifruit; (2) Initiatives that are good for people; (3) Initiatives that are good for the environment; (4) And initiatives that foster a thriving kiwifruit industry.

The first solution selected to move into the pilot phase involves Zespri evaluating the consistency of the colour of its RubyRed Kiwifruit, which is in its third year of commercial production.

â??Our pilot will explore ways we can have better visual consistency with our RubyRed Kiwifruit that will encourage the fruit to produce more of the natural anthocyanins that cause the red fruit colour. As our newest kiwifruit variety, we continue to build

our knowledge so we can meet the strong demand we are seeing with this six-month pilot involving one RubyRed orchardâ? explained Jiunn Shih.

The second pilot is centred around improving the traceability of kiwifruit harvest bins with GPS devices. Each bin will have a unique location identifier with tracking information collected and displayed to users on a software platform.

"This 12-month pilot is designed to help improve the challenge of efficiently managing bins in the supply chain. Having a record of real-time harvest bin movements within or between regions is also important in the event of a biosecurity incursion that affects fruit, such as fruit flyâ?• adds Jiunn Shih.

Pilot three involves a 12-month field trial of biochar on kiwifruit orchards â?? biochar is a carbon-rich material known to improve soil nutrient availability, sequester carbon and improve soil drainage and aeration. While biochar has been used with other crops, this pilot will assess whether it will help improve kiwifruit orchard soil characteristics and therefore possibly improve vine productivity and fruit quality.