

Australia invests \$41Mn to develop new fruit and nut varieties

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Growers and plant scientists in Australia are collaborating on a new \$41 million tree crop program. The program aims to expedite the development of new almond, apple, citrus, macadamia, and mango varieties that will be enjoyed by consumers both in Australia and abroad.

The main goals of the program include creating smaller, high-density orchards to increase yield and implementing automation to alleviate the pressures caused by labour shortages. The new varieties will be designed to possess desirable traits such as improved storage and quality, higher nutritional content, and better resilience to climate change for sustainable Australian-produced fruit and nuts.

This five-year initiative, delivered through Hort Innovation's Frontiers investment program, is being led by a collaboration between QUT, Murdoch University, the University of Queensland (UQ), and Western Sydney University (WSU).

Brett Fifield, the chief executive officer of Hort Innovation, expressed that this investment would prepare tree crop industries for a more productive and profitable future. He highlighted that equipping plant breeders with the necessary tools to develop genetics for the next generation of orchards will help the horticulture industry enhance resilience to climate change and diseases, adopt automation technologies, and increase productivity.

The program builds on over five years of research on tree genomics and crop physiology to improve orchard production systems and develop new tree crop varieties. This research has contributed to providing breeders with new genetic knowledge and tools to assist them in delivering new varieties with beneficial traits.

Lindsay Bryen, the Chair of the Macadamia Industry Variety Improvement Committee, emphasised the importance of access to productive and profitable varieties for the industry's success.