

# INNOVATIVE FRESH FOOD PRESERVATION PROJECT WINS AN AGRITECH GRANT

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) is pleased to announce it has awarded a SMART AgriTech Scheme grant to Rarotonga based business Kuru Kai Foods for their Fresh Food Preservation Project. The project will establish a food processing facility to transform locally sourced raw and cooked foods into new products for both local and export markets.

In contrast to traditional food preservation methods – that evaporate water using heat – Kuru Kai Foods will be using a freeze-drying process that involves freezing the product to 40 degrees below zero, lowering the pressure, then removing the ice through a special process called sublimation. The result is a nutritionally healthy, versatile preserved food product that has retained all its flavour and 97% of its nutritional content – and has an extended shelf life of up to 25 years!

Tai Tapuvae, of Kuru Kai Foods, says: “Freeze drying is a remarkably innovative technique as it is a fully automated process, and unlike other methods of preservation it does not shrink or toughen foods, but it retains their original size, flavour, colour and nutritional content. We intend to use this method to preserve a variety of locally grown foods such as fruits, vegetables & fish as well as cooked foods using recipes unique to the Cook Islands. We are so pleased to be bringing this technology to the Cook Islands with help from Agritech funding.”

Kuru Kai Foods will not only provide a way to preserve the surplus of locally

grown crops for future consumption but will also develop food products using our local traditional recipes allowing those around the world to appreciate a taste of the Cook Islands. With a shelf life of



25 years, Kuru Kai Foods will supply light weight food products perfect for Long Term storage, Disaster Relief, Emergency & Survival packs, Bulk Catering packs

as well as Gift packs and Health Snacks.

To establish the Fresh Food Preservation Project, Kuru Kai Foods need to import high quality productive assets - commercial machinery & equipment - from trusted manufacturers who will also provide installation, commissioning, staff training and ongoing after sales servicing. The Agritech grant will support this investment in acquiring the latest freeze-drying technology and know-how.

“Through the Fresh Food Preservation Project, we hope to build a strong and dynamic, sustainably profitable food processing sector within the local food industry,” says Tai. “We believe it will play a vital role in diversifying the agricultural sector, providing value-add opportunities, and creating surplus for locally made agricultural food products.”

While the Project will initially target the local consumer market via restaurants, cafes, markets, supermarkets and stores, the preserved and packaged products will also be suitable for export to the international market in future with plans to also develop an online store.