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New Zealand aids climate-smart passionfruit farming in Vietnam

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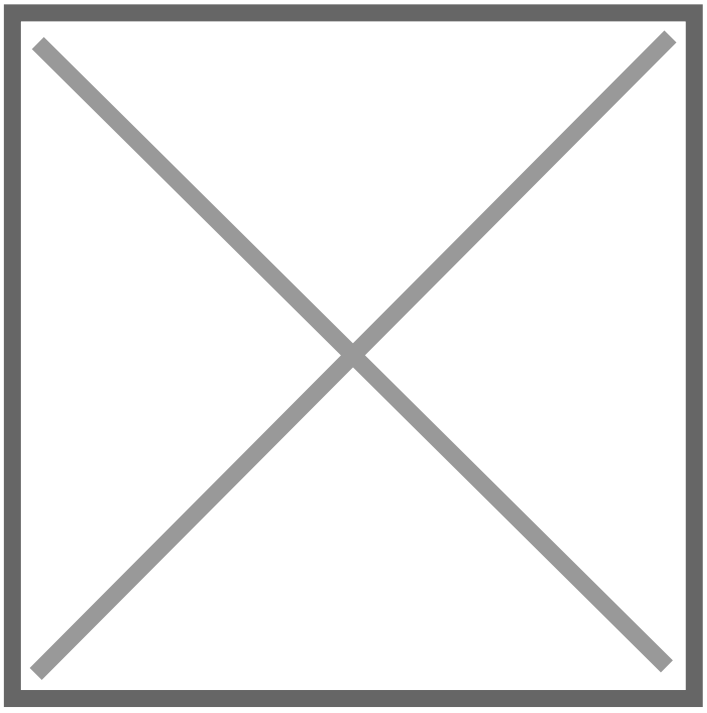

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New Zealand scientists are collaborating with over 70 farmers in rural Vietnam to enhance passionfruit production. The Plant and Food Research team from New Zealand has partnered with the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on the Viet Nam Climate-Smart Fruit Value Chain project, known as VietFruit, for more than two years. This initiative focuses on improving passionfruit cultivation and post-harvest practices in SÆ¡n La province and Gia Lai in Vietnam.

The project aims to empower local farmers by providing insights into managing passionfruit as a high-value, climate-resilient crop. Plant and Food Research senior scientist Karmun Chooi noted the team's efforts to understand the cultivation, threats, and value chain of passionfruit. "We're looking at how once we've harvested the fruit, how to transport that fruit and store that fruit so it's the best quality fruit for consumption in-country, but also exported," Chooi said.

The VietFruit project involves collaboration with Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, plant nurseries, and research institutions like the Southern Horticultural Research Institute of Vietnam (SOFRI) and the Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI). The initiative includes working with female and ethnic minority farmers to conduct farm trials on various management techniques.

Chooi emphasized the importance of practical solutions for improving production, particularly for ethnic minority farmers, to achieve higher yields and better quality fruit. The project also focuses on ensuring high hygiene standards, strategic pruning, appropriate agrichemical application, and optimizing planting and harvesting timing.

The project also aims to develop a low-cost plant disease diagnostic tool to detect viral diseases, enhancing the ability of nurseries and laboratories to conduct diagnostics. Chooi expressed the goal of improving farmers' knowledge bases, enabling them to become "their own scientists" in growing passionfruit and other crops.

Stephanie Montgomery, project co-lead and international development programme manager, highlighted the challenges posed by climate change, such as unpredictable weather patterns. The project explores ways to buffer farmers against these changes, including increasing cover cropping and water storage options.

Montgomery noted the willingness of Vietnamese farmers to engage with innovation groups and the wider project, despite challenges like plant disease. The team plans to regularly report back to partners and farmers on progress and trial new passionfruit washer prototypes.