

09 May 2013 **A new program has been developed to reinvigorate the Tongan Vanilla Industry. The program is the most significant single direct investment in the Tongan Vanilla industry for decades.**

Vanilla growers and community groups from the principal growing region on the island of Vava'u stand to thrive from the partnership with Queen Fine Foods of Australia and Queen New Zealand. Queen is renowned for its commitment to and care of the international vanilla industry.

Growers that join the partnership will be rewarded with favourable prices for their quality beans and a long term supply agreement with Queen.

Working closely with vanilla growers, Queen has developed the Queen Vanilla Curing Certification Course (QVCCC). This program works with grower members to develop sustainable farming practices, by providing funding towards critical vanilla curing infrastructure and farmers education in vanilla curing. The outcome of this program will allow Tongan farmers a great control over their crop each year.

Dr Sam Himstedt one of the family members that pioneered the program said, "We are proud to partner with the people of Tonga to reinvigorate their vanilla industry. This is the only true, sustainable program on a scale that will assist not only the growers but the people of Tonga now and for future generations. He said, "any focus to value add the crop will allow growers the ability achieve a more consistent and premium price for their beans over the long term".

The program will also assist growers to achieve organic certification for their plantations. To get the program underway, Queen is assisting growers with an incentive structure to reinvigorate their vines. Dr Himstedt says, "The incentivised program acknowledges it takes time and effort to bring vines back up to international production standards. Growers can therefore be assured of a purchase commitment from Queen at the beginning of the season, well before vanilla beans are harvested."

Queen Fine Foods is an Australian owned family company. The business has been working with growers and producing award winning vanilla products for over 100 years. We would like to thank Taste of Tonga Director Mr Ian Jones, who will be responsible for the ground operation and administering the quality and training programs.

Taste of Tonga has established itself as an exporter of Virgin Coconut Oil in Vava'u and will now assist us in rolling out the vanilla reinvigoration plans for Tonga. Ian Jones brings strong management and leadership skills to our team and has already developed good relationships with

the farmers in Vava'u. "I see this as being an amazing opportunity for Tonga, the support that Queen Fine Foods will bring to the vanilla industry will see it revitalised. It will allow the transfer of new knowledge into Tonga and see existing knowledge transferring from the pioneers of the vanilla industry to a group of young and enthusiastic people keen to continue and develop the industry into the future. The QVCCC is the key to this transfer" said Ian Jones.

We would also like to thank officers within the Tongan Ministry for Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Fisheries, Pacific Islands Trade and Invest , Fairtrade Australia and New Zealand and Australian Certified Organic for their input into developing the program framework.

ENDS

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The Honorable Minister Sione Sangster Saulala spoke about the program, "This is a fantastic outcome for Tongan Vanilla. We have the ideal conditions to grow this crop. Queen can assist us to become world's best in growing and curing Vanilla. This is a fair program that will benefit the people of Tonga.

We are particularly impressed with Queens' commitment to the ongoing development of the

vanilla industry with the introduction of the Queen Vanilla Curing Certificate Course. This initiative recognises the bank of knowledge about vanilla in Tonga and will assist in ensuring it passes on to the next generation of vanilla producers”.