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Boosting the nation's macadamia harvest

Despite the industry being affected by the recent severe weather, Australian macadamia growers are nevertheless hopeful of another strong crop this season, and will no doubt welcome news that new research aims to reduce the harvest window by several weeks and save the industry a combined estimated total of more than \$30M per year.

Being delivered by Horticulture Innovation Australia using macadamia industry levies and funds from the Australian Government, the research will work to improve nut collection options and the harvest window.

Horticulture Innovation Australia chief executive John Lloyd said the research will present a game changer for the industry.

"In Australia, macadamia nuts are harvested mechanically from the orchard floor after they drop naturally from trees, typically between March and August. As a result, growers need to run a significant number of harvest rounds each season," he said.

"Not only does this take time, it can result in nut quality loss if they are on the ground for extended periods; nut maturities can vary and there is limited opportunity to fertilise, prune and mow during the harvest window. Growers also estimate they could lose about 15 per cent of their crop due to nuts missed during harvesting or falling outside the harvest window."

"This project aims to dramatically reduce these factors through the investigation of new harvesting tech adoption, pruning options and incremental changes to current farm equipment. All up, our researchers estimate these changes could save growers a combined total of about \$30M a year if applied across the 17,000-odd hectares of trees we have currently in Australia."

The Australian Macadamia Society suggests that a 7 per cent yield improvement is possible with a small investment in capital upgrades and improved cultural practices, and estimates also suggest there is the potential for dramatic profit improvements with further technology development.

Australian Macadamia Society chief executive Jolyon Burnett said global demand for macadamias continues to far outweigh supply, and any research that aims to improve supply is a welcome initiative.

"Hopefully by the 2018 harvest the project will have identified areas where improvements in harvesting can be made which would be great news for Australian macadamia growers," Mr Burnett said.

Beginning this month, this research will be conducted by the Colere Group in partnership with the National Centre for Engineering in Agriculture (University of Southern Queensland), the University of Queensland and AgTrans Research, working closely with the AMS. The project will be complete early 2019.

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