

Media Release

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COLES AWARDS MORE THAN \$3.5 MILLION TO HELP TURN PRODUCERS' IDEAS INTO REALITY

IMAGES & VIDEO AVAILABLE [HERE](#)

More than \$3.5 million in grants has been awarded to eight small and medium-sized businesses across Australia through the latest round of the Coles Nurture Fund, helping bring a new wave of innovative food and farming initiatives to life.

Recipients from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania will use the funding to explore projects from native giant freshwater prawn aquaculture and Australian-grown kiwi berries to AI-powered zucchini grading and driverless tractor technology.

Since 2015, the Coles Nurture Fund has awarded more than \$43 million to 127 Australian businesses in financial support to back ideas that support sustainability, efficiency and growth.

Coles Group Chief Commercial and Sustainability Officer Anna Croft said the Round 14 recipients reflected the ingenuity, ambition and practical problem-solving of local producers.

"These projects show the breadth of innovation happening across Australia, from AI zucchini grading technology and Indigenous-led aquaculture to turning imperfect ginger and turmeric into Australian-grown pantry products and taking mobile dehydration technology directly to farms.

"Each recipient is tackling a real challenge in their business or industry, whether that's reducing waste, improving efficiency, creating new opportunities for regional communities or developing more sustainable ways to produce food."

Far North Queensland not-for-profit Hope Vale Foundation was awarded a \$500,000 Coles Nurture Fund grant to scale up a native giant freshwater prawn project, create new jobs and help bring an Australian-grown native protein, long valued by the Hope Vale Aboriginal community, to more Australians.

Hope Vale Foundation General Manager Rachelle McIvor said the grant would help the 100 per cent Indigenous-owned and operated not-for-profit move from a successful hatchery trial to building its own hatchery and grow-out ponds on its 19-hectare research and development farm near Cooktown.

"We've already proven this can work, with our hatchery trial producing around 200,000 juvenile prawns when

we were expecting about 20,000 and now this funding helps us take the next big step," she said.

"Cherabin is something our community knows and loves, but many Australians haven't had the chance to experience it yet. It's a beautiful native freshwater prawn and we think it has a really exciting future as an Australian-grown native protein.

"This project is about much more than prawns. It's about creating meaningful jobs that suit our community, building skills and opening up future opportunities for local people to be part of the supply chain. Because the pond water can also be reused to irrigate crops on the farm, it gives us a connected system that links aquaculture and agriculture on the same property."

Drawing on the Bell family's experience helping grow Australia's blueberry market, second-generation Northern Rivers business Tallogum Berries was awarded a \$495,000 Coles Nurture Fund grant to help turn kiwi berries from a little-known novelty fruit into a more reliable, commercially viable berry crop.

The funding will support a commercial plot for a next-generation kiwi berry genetic program, allowing the business to test selected varieties at scale and work towards extending the fruit's short supply window.

Tallogum Berries Business Owner Natalie Bell said the grant would help the family business build the foundations for a more reliable kiwi berry supply and give more Australians the chance to try a berry many may not have seen before.

"Kiwi berries are like a small, snackable version of kiwifruit, with smooth edible skin, so they're the kind of lunchbox fruit you don't have to cut," she said.

"When I first came into blueberries, only one in three people had tried one and now they're on supermarket shelves almost year-round. We see a similar opportunity with kiwi berries, but to get there we need to test the right genetics and build a longer, more reliable supply window.

"My own kids absolutely devour them before they even make it into the school lunchbox, so we know the product has real family appeal. With Coles' support, we can take the next step towards making kiwi berries a fruit more Australians can try and buy more regularly."

Additional Coles Nurture Fund recipients awarded grants in Round 14 include:

- **Zest Element (Sunshine Coast, Queensland)** was awarded a grant of \$500,000 to build its first mobile dehydration hub, a solar-powered, heat-pumped system built into an upcycled semi-trailer, helping farmers turn excess and out-of-spec produce into 100 per cent Australian-grown fruit powders.
- **Mount Sylvia Fresh (Mount Sylvia, Queensland)** was awarded a grant of \$500,000 to build an on-farm food manufacturing facility for ginger paste and turmeric powder, helping the three-generation family farm turn imperfect and excess produce into convenient, Australian-grown products.
- **Pirrone Brothers (Ayr, Queensland)** was awarded a grant of \$500,000 to install a Cellox Z-UHD AI zucchini grading system, helping the third-generation fresh produce grower grade zucchinis more accurately, reduce waste and make better use of the crop they grow.
- **Wintergreen Farm (Somerton, New South Wales)** was awarded a grant of \$500,000 to build a 30 megalitre above-ground water storage system using interconnected water bladders, helping the

family-owned broiler chicken farm create a closed and controlled water supply for its growing poultry operation.

- **Cummaudo Farms (Mirboo North, Victoria)** was awarded a grant of \$500,000 to purchase a driverless tractor, helping the third-generation family-owned potato and onion farm improve efficiency, reduce fatigue and test how automation could support Australian growers.
- **EcoHarvest (Liffey Valley, Tasmania)** was awarded a grant of \$90,000 to upgrade its irrigation system, automate soil moisture monitoring and mowing, and support soil health across the first-generation certified organic berry farm.

Australian small and medium-sized businesses are encouraged to apply for the 15th round of the Coles Nurture Fund when applications open in January 2027.

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