

Rural Outlook



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RURAL

■ A two-million-dollar loan from the Government's Whenua Maori Fund will enhance the lives of many Maori landowners and young people. Miro Berries in Te Teko is one of eight recipients of a total of \$30 million which comes from the \$100 million Whenua Maori investment fund, created last year, which draws from the \$3 billion Provincial Growth Fund (PGF).



MIRO MAORI: Miro Berries in Te Teko has expanded and staff and shareholders help to develop the largest blueberry farm in New Zealand. Photo supplied

Whenua helping enrich Maori

Delilah Whaitiri
Staff reporter

MIRO Berries, established in 2018, is a collective of Maori food producers and combines ancient traditions and values handed down by their ancestors, with modern technology and science, to produce great tasting, premium produce for the world, and is now expanding.

Development on the Meihana-Koata block on Macdonald Road has already started on Block A, which consists of 10 hectares of land, and work including, tunnelling, infrastructure, matting, planting and irrigation is expected to finish this month, chief executive Liz Te Amo said.

"Our employees have set themselves an aggressive target," she said.

Development of Block B, consisting of a further 10 hectares, will commence shortly, and Ms Te Amo said the collective had designated \$2.1 million from the fund to develop 20 of the 30 acres which the organisation has leased off the trust.

The business currently employs 12 full-time permanent staff, but this is set to increase ten-fold and will provide hundreds of seasonal jobs, with first preference going to those who whakapapa back to the whenua.

Ms Te Amo said one of the problems for Maori landowners was that they had not been receiving fair rental for their land.

"Our vision is that they get fair land rental, their people get the jobs, and they can own the development over their land, and the PGF Whenua Maori funding helps them do this," she said.

"Everyone is getting more landowner servient and os keen to be involved in the development of the land and get paid fair leases.

"Our vision is that they should be owners and their people should get the jobs," she said.

Many of the business' new employees have recently come off a benefit, Ms Te Amo said.

'It's incredible to witness how the health and wellbeing of young mothers and grandparents has changed.

Our vision is that they should be owners and their people should get the jobs.

- Liz Te Amo

"One of our mothers came to work and shared how her son had superhero day at school. He dressed up like his mother because he sees her going to work each day and she's his hero," she said.

Committed to helping grow rangatahi, Ms Te Amo said young people would learn necessary skills such as tunnel infrastructure and modern horticulture skills.

The berry farm is set to harvest next year and at peak time we will need a minimum of 10 workers per hectare, providing up to 200 jobs for locals and whanau.

The extended orchard will be the biggest blueberry development of its kind, at this time and Maori are at the forefront.

"We're very proud," she said.