

Summary of the CRC-REP Plant Business Project



Aboriginal Community Researchers collect Bush Tomato genetic material



Bush Tomato plant



Bush Tomato trial

The Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) is a seven-year programme that is based in Alice Springs and covers the 85% of Australia's land mass which is remote Australia. The CRC-REP is managed by Ninti One Limited, a not-for-profit company that builds opportunities for people living in remote Australia through research, innovation and community development.

The Plant Business project is one of the CRC-REP's 12 research programmes. The Plant Business research is guided by industry partners: Australian Native Foods Industry, Robin's Foods, Kungas Can Cook, Tuckeroo Food services, Mayi Harvests & Mamanyjun Banaga Consultancy and FAL Lawyers. Ninti One will be holding discussions with the new Agribusiness Growth Centre about funding the development of new native plant industries and employment for Aboriginal communities through the revised CRC programme.

The aim of the Plant Business project is to develop a model that is acceptable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the commercial development of valuable native plant species. The model will form the basis for a wide range of prospective industries based on plants such as those used in bush medicine, Kakadu Plum, and yams. Horticultural production of bush foods will become more efficient and profitable.

Research to date has focused on enhancing the supply of the bush food plant Bush Tomato (*Solanum centrale*) in the Northern Territory through development and deployment of superior varieties that will return economic benefit to traditional custodians of source plants. The project also explores ways that laws, science and institutions can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve different needs and aspirations associated with their Traditional Knowledge and secure greater returns for the genetic resources that are used commercially.

Core project – Following collection of genetic material, with the support of Aboriginal researchers, a field trial was established and genetic selections have been made, including prospective new Bush Tomato varieties originating from Native Title lands. Full details are provided on the project [webpage](#) and in a recent short email [update](#). An illustrated [book](#) to explain the project to Aboriginal communities has also been developed.

The Plant Business project is poised to establish its first semi-commercial Bush Tomato trial plantings with the cooperation of several current growers and Aboriginal community partners. The project also has very close links with SMEs in the Bush Tomato processing and marketing arena, and the project's Advisory Group is made up almost entirely of industry participants.

Protecting the cultural interests of Aboriginal custodians in bush food commercialisation – In conjunction with the field research, Plant Business is conducting legal research to develop strategies that can better safeguard the interests of Aboriginal people whose cultural heritage is the subject of commercialisation. These strategies, summarised in this [publication](#), include conjoint utilisation of multiple existing legal instruments, establishment of new federal regulations, proposing new legislation, and adoption of inclusive governance policies by stakeholder organisations involved in commercialisation of culture-based products.



Enrichment planting for cultural relevance – The lack of relevance of agricultural practices to Aboriginal cultural lifestyles may in part account for the poor uptake of farming business opportunities by remote communities.

'[Enrichment planting](#)' entails establishment of plants for food, medicine or other uses in a landscape that is otherwise natural and largely undisturbed. Plant Business is promoting enrichment planting, with Bush Tomato demonstration plots at remote Aboriginal communities. The project is also supporting development of management, business and product marketing skills. Plant Business is now collaborating with R&D partners in Western Australia involved in Kakadu Plum, the key exemplar for enrichment planting.

Research capabilities – In addition to university-based researchers in biology and law, the project employs Ninti One's team of Aboriginal Community Researchers to work with a central Australian remote community to source plant genetic material in a culturally appropriate manner. This unique capability helps to ensure that appropriate cultural permissions are obtained when bioprospecting. These permissions have been obtained for only very few of the Australian native species that have been commercialised to date. Ninti One also has expertise in negotiating the myriad regulations and permits applying to bioprospecting and commercialisation. Our overriding aim is to ensure a flow of benefits back to the hereditary custodians of utilised traditional bush food knowledge.

Reach-through to other bush foods – Ninti One is a member of the peak industry body, Australian Native Foods Industry Limited (ANFIL) and is represented on the ANFIL Research Committee. Through this body, CRC-REP extends its influence to the wider bush foods industry and has also become involved in other native plant business opportunities. Plant Business – through associated collaborations with RIRDC projects, Kimberley Training Institute and our many industry networks – is developing an involvement in other bush food areas, for example Kakadu Plum, *Solanum chippendalei* and products of native grasses. Project staff are applying their expertise in numerous activities in development of bush food business opportunities that support Aboriginal enterprise and communities such as:

- establishing semi-commercial Bush Tomato trial plantings with the cooperation of current growers and Aboriginal community partners
- creating enrichment planting sites of Bush Tomato for promoting culturally relevant bush enterprise development opportunities in Aboriginal communities
- working with experienced colleagues from industry and education sectors with expertise in enrichment planting of Kakadu Plum and other bush food species
- collaboration in related projects of other agencies that are developing bush food industry initiatives, including:
 - RIRDC's ANFIL Kakadu Plum R&D facilitation project
 - representation on the ANFIL Research Committee by a Ninti One researcher
 - participation in International Institute of Agri-Food Security scoping project Matching Climate, Soils and Plants for Agricultural Development in the Pilbara Region.

Future aspirations – with 12 years of experience with native plant development and commercialisation in close consultation with Aboriginal people, Ninti One has the capacity to apply its capability and expertise to developing further industries based on native species that will provide employment in remote and northern Australia and service emerging markets. The new Agribusiness Growth Centre has the potential to support the development of new native plant industries and employment for Aboriginal communities through the revised CRC programme.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS RESEARCH,
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Bush Tomato fruit



Kakadu Plum

