



## Island to Island: Reniala's Mission to Transform Agriculture in Mauritius

In the serene enclave of Baie du Tombeau, where the gentle rustle of vanilla vines mingles with the tranquil presence of water lilies, resides Olivier Tam Teon. His abode, a living testament to nature's bounty, is shared with fish, rabbits, chickens, robusta coffee plants, and the exotic pitaya. With over four decades dedicated to agriculture and aquaculture in Madagascar, Olivier now embarks on a transformative journey in Mauritius. His enterprise, Reniala—aptly named after the Malagasy term for the revered baobab tree, “mother of the forest”—has taken root within the Eco Villaz agricultural ecosystem in Albion. Here, he cultivates bananas and dragon fruit, with aspirations to expand into taro, vanilla, and palm cultivation.



Olivier's odyssey began in the lush landscapes of Tamatave, Madagascar. As a child, he shadowed his mother through expansive plantations, her profound connection to the land igniting his own passion for agriculture. While his siblings pursued divergent paths, Olivier remained steadfast, embracing the fertile Malagasy soil as his heritage. He recalls, "She didn't just work the land; she lived it. That dedication left an indelible mark on me."

In 1987, Olivier assumed stewardship of the family's 90-hectare plantation. Under his guidance, the estate flourished with 2,000 lychee trees, 10 hectares of coffee, 5 hectares of vanilla, and a variety of other crops, including palms and pepper. Innovatively, he ventured into processing, creating niche products like palm heart pickles, thereby enhancing the value of his harvests. Reflecting on this period, he notes, "Diversifying our products allowed us to reach new markets and showcase the versatility of our produce."

Balancing dual vocations, Olivier spent weekdays immersed in construction projects in Antananarivo and weekends tending to his plantation. This harmonious duality allowed him to cultivate his agricultural passion without financial encumbrance. He muses, "I lived a

double life. Monday to Friday, I wore a hard hat. On weekends, I was among my trees, feeling the earth beneath my feet."

His ventures expanded into aquaculture, where he pioneered commercial koi fish production in Madagascar. Managing a 12-hectare fish farm, he annually produced 300,000 koi, distributing them island-wide. Additionally, he raised fingerlings of royal carp and tilapia, empowering local communities to enhance food security through sustainable fish farming. Olivier reflects, "It was rewarding to see how something as simple as fish farming could contribute to local food security."

### Eco Villaz

A pivotal chapter unfolded when Olivier relocated to Mauritius after marrying a Mauritian woman. This transition introduced him to Bernard Chan and Eric Wong, the visionary behind Eco Villaz in Albion. They recognized in Olivier not merely a farmer but a catalyst for innovative agricultural practices in Mauritius. Eco Villaz, a collaborative community dedicated to sustainable agriculture and aquaculture, resonated deeply with Olivier's ethos, inspiring a renewed vision of possibility. He recalls, "They saw more in me than just a farmer; they saw someone

who could contribute fresh ideas to Mauritius."

In 2024, Olivier established Reniala, commencing with the cultivation of 1,000 dwarf Cavendish banana plants and nearly 2,000 pitaya (dragon fruit) plants on four acres of leased land. The dwarf bananas, with their sturdy, low-growing stems, yield substantial bunches, each weighing up to 30 kilograms. The pitaya, adorned with vibrant pink skin and delicate white flesh, produces up to 15 kilograms per plant annually. Olivier shares, "It's hard work, but watching those fruits thrive feels like seeing your children succeed."

### Diversification

Looking ahead, Olivier envisions expanding Reniala's cultivated area, introducing taro cultivation using a dry-planting method he perfected in Madagascar, resulting in larger, more robust roots. He explains, "In Madagascar, we plant taro in dry soil. It grows bigger, up to 60 centimeters."

Building upon his extensive experience, Olivier plans also to diversify Reniala's offerings. Known for its delicate flavor and nutritional value, heart of palm is a sought-after delicacy. Olivier's prior experience in processing palm



hearts into pickles positions Reniala to tap into both local and export markets, offering value-added products that cater to gourmet consumers.

A tropical staple, papaya is celebrated for its health benefits and versatility. "By integrating papaya cultivation, Reniala can supply fresh produce to local markets and explore opportunities in the processed fruit sector, such as dried papaya and jams", highlights Olivier.

With its unique flavor profile, passion fruit holds significant potential in both fresh and processed forms. Olivier plans to cultivate varieties that thrive in Mauritius's climate, aiming to supply local markets and develop products like juices and preserves.

Recognizing the growing demand for avocados, Olivier intends to introduce this nutrient-rich fruit to Reniala's portfolio. By selecting suitable avocado varieties and implementing best practices, he aims to meet local demand and explore export possibilities.

Olivier's plans include establishing a greenhouse dedicated to vanilla cultivation, leveraging his extensive experience with this high-value crop. By creating a controlled environment, he aims to replicate the specific conditions necessary for optimal vanilla growth, such as appropriate temperature, humidity, and shading. This approach not only enhances yield and quality but also mitigates risks associated with climatic variability and pests", he says.

Reniala's vision extends beyond cultivation to processing raw produce into market-ready products, targeting both local and export markets. This farm-to-table approach aims to create value at every stage, from palm heart pickles to packaged dragon fruit and internationally distributed vanilla. Olivier asserts, "We want to go from farm to table, creating value at every step." For him, Reniala represents more than a business; it is a legacy, a testament to his lifelong dedication to the land and his aspiration to contribute to Mauritius's journey toward food security. He concludes, "I've loved farming since I was a boy. Now, I have a chance to share that love with Mauritius, to help the island move toward food security."

