

GARDENING A WAY TO HELP STAFF



The Suva Christian Community Home Garden for staff.

Nestled on a hill in the quiet suburb of Leveti Street in Domain is the Suva Christian Community School, a private primary Christian school that was established in 1997 to provide a high-quality education programme, not only to attain academic excellence but also to place special importance on character-building for our future leaders.

The school uses the Accelerated Christian Education (A.C.E.) programme. The programme combines the traditional one-room school with completely individualized instruction for learning allowing each student to work at their own level of achievement.

The tour around the well maintained colonial styled compound with staff Louisa John was not only a site to behold as we marveled not only the school setting and the flowers but also of the initiative of the backyard garden.

The staff of the private Christian school have moved from nurturing and developing students creative and critical abilities co-operatively to farming the backyard for health and wealth.

"Since the beginning of the pandemic, the staff were given the privilege of cultivating the school yard for assorted vegetables," said Louisa.

The school has a total of 20 staff, 14 teachers and 6 office staff with a majority planting at the school and at their individual homes.

The idea to start a backyard garden in school to assist staff during the COVID-19 pandemic was brought forth and cooperatively agreed upon by the Director Patrick Bower and the Senior Primary Principal Wayne O'Connor.

"It was an initiative that we are all happy about as some of us do not have sufficient land to plant back at our respective homes and because

we spend most of our days in school it is also a good way for its maintenance," she said.

"Apart from hidden interests amongst staff, Mr. O'Connor has also been advising us to do backyard farming and it is now that we realize the positive feedback of that advice," said Louisa.

The backyard garden in the school lawn is set out accordingly to each staff and its maintenance is each individual's responsibility and accountability.

"Each staff knows which plots belong to them and we plant a variety of vegetables in it, and it is exciting to compare and share new techniques with other staff," she said.

The plots includes assorted vegetables such as cabbages, carrots, spring onions, bele, french bean, long bean, coriander, chillies, tomatoes, pumpkins and cucumbers.

"The materials for the plots are extracted from resources on the ground that is the chopped up logs from the fallen trees that were cleared because of TC Harold, and coconut husks to form plot," said Louisa.

"As most of us are new to backyard farming, our knowledge of planting is based on the assistance of internet," she said.

The staff of the Suva Christian Community School are also recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture's COVID-19 Home Gardening Response packages, a boost they received that could accommodate their shorten hours at work.

produce in our meals and we have been continuing with our vegetables and are looking into other vegetables that we can plant in the compound."

People are often challenged by the little spaces they have and for the staff of SCCS they made do with the piece of land they are provided for to up-skill and practice what they could have done before.

"For some of us, our regret is

not practicing backyard gardening before COVID-19 and it took a pandemic to make us do it," she said.

"But nothing is too late when the passion and urgency is upon you, you can do anything without the approval of others and keep growing food as in these times backyard gardening will really help you not only financially but spiritually and physically."

SABETO FARMERS AIM TO EXCEL IN AGRICULTURE



Sabeto farmers after signing their contract with AMA.

More farmers showed interest to sign the Contractual Farming initiative of the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA).

A total of 117 farmers from Naboutini 1, Masimasi, Nadele, Nasasa, Naboutini 2, Nagado, and Keolaiya and nearby areas of Sabeto have already signed the contract and another 150 will be signing soon.

The Advisory Councillor of Sabeto, Mr. Vinesh Chand Rai said contractual farming provides a secured market for the farmers which will improve the standard of living for Sabeto rural household farmers.

He said this initiative is used as a strategy to expand farming to a commercial level and produce quality crops for food and income security and meet the market demand.

The farmers will plant and supply a quota of selected crops like Cassava, Kumala, Peanut, Bongo chilly, Celery and Capsicum to AMA.

The Ministry of Agriculture will

provide planting materials at no cost to the farmers, and as part of this assistance agreement, in three years they will return the planting material so other farmers can benefit from the same.

"During the first phase of contract signing, the seeds were expensive in the market which was a major drawback for the contracted farmers hence Naboutini Sabeto Nursery was established to keep the expenses away from the farmers," said Mr. Rai.

He said Mr. Liyakat Ali of Naboutini Sabeto constructed the nursery on his land to raise seedlings which will be supplied to the contracted farmers.

The nursery was built by the contracted farmers, the landowners, the area committee and the people of Sabeto.

Mr. Rai thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Marketing Authority for their support in getting farmers to be a part of the contractual farming initiative.



AMA CEO Mr. Alvin Singh guiding a Sabeto farmer while signing his contract in Nadi.