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MoU signed to formalise FNPf's Voluntary Membership Schemes for farmers



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (2nd from right), CEO FNPf Mr. Jaoji Koroi (2nd from left), PSA Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass (left) and CEO AMA Mr. Alvin Sharma (right) at the signing.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) and Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPf) in making farmers and cluster members, the members of the FNPf Voluntary Membership Scheme.

While officiating the signing at the Ministry of Agriculture's conference room last week, the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon.

Dr. Mahendra Reddy said this is a milestone achievement towards making every farmer a member of FNPf to ensure they are socially and financially secured when they retire.

"Today's official signing marks the beginning of a new chapter to the lives of our hardworking farmers, individual household members, and the wider rural farming communities all over Fiji," said Dr. Reddy.

He said the initiative will

bring relevant stakeholders like FNPf and AMA together in a more coordinated and organised arrangement, generating positive returns to farmers, expansion of the agriculture sector and rapid economic growth of our beloved nation.

"Following Cyclone Harold and COVID-19 pandemic, whereby the members benefitted from their FNPf fund, the majority of the farmers were not eligible for these benefits because they are not members of the institution."

"The signing will assist us in education and awareness of the FNPf through the Ministry of Agriculture and AMA. The staff will ensure that correct data is provided to make these farmers members of the social security institution," said Dr. Reddy.

The Hon. Minister said this signing will also provide assurance to the farmers that the deposit is secure and they will be treated like any pension member.

During the past weeks, the Ministry has been working closely with AMA through the Contractual

Farming Initiative with the aim to leverage the agriculture sector towards becoming the country's leading economic sector.

So far the Ministry of Agriculture and the AMA have signed contracts with farmers of Nubu Farms in Nadarivatu, Naivorati Farms in Lomaivuna, Naitasiri; Sabeto Cluster Farms in Nadi, Waito Farms in Tailevu and Nataleira Cluster Initiative at Dawasamu, Tailevu.

"Given the nature of the agricultural product and its importance in securing member's future, AMA through the MoA support would continue to encourage farmers/suppliers to become voluntary members."

"This will ensure funds are set aside for retirement purposes. They should be able to access health, education, housing and other social benefits that are currently enjoyed by compulsory members," said Dr. Reddy.

The Voluntary Membership Scheme is an inclusive retirement savings arrangement that targets individuals (including farmers), who have made enormous contributions

towards the informal sector.

He said this signing aims to boost agri-business potential and actively promoting agriculture-led economic growth through the establishment of large commercial ventures.

"Together we will continue to pursue the notion that being a member of the FNPf Voluntary Membership Schemes will be the way forward for our farmers/clusters while taking advantage of the significant benefits and incentives it provides," said Dr. Reddy.

The Chief Executive Officer of FNPf Mr. Jaoji Koroi said the agriculture sector is a key part of the economy and this has become quite clear over the past few months while the nation has been dealing with COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of our borders.

He said this partnership between FNPf, MoA and AMA will see farmers not only contributing to food security at a national level but will be able to build up their savings for their own financially secure future.

Northern farmers interested to sign a contract with AMA

Farmers in the Northern Division were enlightened on the benefits of contractual farming with Agricultural Marketing Authority of Fiji (AMA) during their recent trip to the North.

Following the awareness meeting with the suppliers, farmers and staff, the Chief Executive Officer Mr Alvin Sharma confirmed the company's partnership with the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPf).

"AMA will soon sign a

contract with interested farmers and collaborate with Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPf) to get the qualifying farmers to become members of the Fund," he said.

The benefit of contract farming was further elaborated during the farmers Talanoa session in addition to the allocated 20 acres of land by the farmers of Navave Village in Bua for the developing of planting and supplying to AMA.

Additional farmers from

Seaqaqa, Dreketi, Wainikoro, Navave Village and Dama in Bua have shown interest to be contractual farmers with AMA.

According to the Agricultural Marketing Authority of Fiji, 150 farmers in the Northern Division are supplying commodities such as cassava, dalo, duruka, chillies, ginger, and seafood for local and export market.

In addition to crops, the AMA is also investing in aqua farmers

buying fish from fishermen of Qaranivai Village near Udu Point who have been suppliers to the company for the past two years.

"More fishers from nearby villages have also expressed interest in supplying fish to AMA and these fishers will also become contracted aqua farmers of AMA soon," said Mr Sharma.

Furthermore, the entourage received 20 Taveuni farmers interested in AMA'S contractual

farming concept.

"With a positive response from farmers in Taveuni the Ministry of Agriculture and AMA will now conduct a 'Land Use Survey' at their respective farms," said Mr Sharma.

For the way forward, a team from the Agricultural Marketing Authority of Fiji will later resume operation for the signing of contracts with farmers in the Northern Division.

TNR Programme to address the stray dog issue

The Animal Health and Production Division of the Ministry of Agriculture is working on ways to address the increase in the number of stray dogs and dog attacks around the country.

To curb the problem of stray dogs, the Ministry of Agriculture veterinarians perform the ongoing Trapping, Neutering and Releasing (TNR) exercise in Fiji on requests by the villages and communities.

The exercise also involves partners from the private sector, mainly Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), Animals Fiji, and Vet Essentials.

In recent years, there has been an annual Charles Sturt University outreach neutering program that also involved the Ministry of Agriculture de-sexing services in outer islands and in Suva.

Under the Stray Animal Control Program of the Regulatory Unit of the Animal Health and Production Division, the long term exercise prevents the increase of the stray

dog population by preventing them from reproducing and allows the stray dog population to die out naturally.

A stray animal is an animal that is not tethered, not confined to the owner's property and does not have any official identification (brands, ear tags, license).

Recently, a Trapping, Neutering and Releasing (TNR) campaign was held at Yanuya village in Malolo by the Senior Veterinary Officer Dr. Beato Lenoa and Paravets from the Ministry of Agriculture.

This was after requests by the village headmen of the concern on the increase in the number of dogs and dog attacks on the island.

Following the TNR operation on the island, the Ministry of Agriculture staff carried out the awareness to villages on the importance of Responsible Pet Ownerships to give them the sense of ownership, the initiative of proper treatment of dogs.

The Ministry also allows

adoption and re-homing of the de-sexed dogs, and members of the public who are pet lovers will only need to pay for the license for the rehoming and adoption of these dogs, which is \$13.20 per dog to be paid on an annual basis.

For those de-sexed dogs that have not been claimed or rehomed within a certain period of time, were released back into the areas they were trapped in as part of the TNR program.

A total of 682 stray dogs were captured during the 8-week Stray Dog Control Campaign which was carried out concurrently throughout urban and peri-urban areas in the country from 17 June till 09 August 2019.

Of the total dogs caught during the Campaign, 432 dogs were neutered, 91 dogs were re-homed with 373 dogs being released back into the areas in which they were initially trapped, and 218 animals being humanely euthanized.



Senior Veterinary Officer Dr. Beato Lenoa assisted by the Paravet Elenoa Ratubola during the TNA exercise in Malolo.



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