

One of Fiji's Biggest Nursery Opens In Sabeto



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (holding tray of seedlings) with guests at the opening of the Naboutini Sabeto Nursery.

A nursery that has the capacity to house 360,000 seedlings from an initial investment of about \$70,000 was recently opened by the Hon. Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Dr Mahendra Reddy.

"Today is another milestone achievement for the Sabeto farmer cluster in terms of establishing one of

the largest nursery in this country.

"There is about 70,000 bongo chillies here. These farmers who will be taking these seedlings to grow on their farms, are contracted with Agro Marketing Authority," he said.

In commending the initiative, Dr. Reddy said Government was strongly encouraging farmers to move towards

becoming an agricultural entrepreneur.

"Put your entire intellect, entire resource, entire energy, on growing quality produce and making it ready for the market to be picked up. That's the model we are promoting," he said.

The Hon. Minister said in order for the agriculture sector to grow in Fiji, there was a need to grow the market.

"We want to bring market signal to the farmer, as we have done here with Agro Marketing Authority and also other exporters around the country, who are providing market signals to the farmer."

Dr. Reddy explained Government would continue to support the three commercial models of agriculture, which included all categories of farmers, whether they were large, medium, or small.

He said the first model was the business-minded entrepreneur who set themselves up on their own, farm and then export their commodities. The second model, the Hon. Minister said, were those that established processing plants and contracted farmers to supply to them; these businesses process and then export. The third type, he said, were cluster farmers, such as the Sabeto initiative, where farmers focused on commercial farming on the same crops; learn from each other, were provided machinery to use in that cluster, trained in correct farming practices and methods to ensure they produced quality commodities for export via the Agriculture Marketing Authority.

He applauded the two men who made the nursery initiative a reality

– Mr Liakat Ali and Mr Vinesh Rai, the Advisory Councillor of the area.

"We will need more Liakat Alis' and Vinesh Rais' in Fiji and if we get a dozen like them, the aspirations of our agriculture sector will be fully realized".

Mr. Rai said 117 farmers formed the Sabeto cluster but the number would continue to grow.

"We're proud of what has been achieved so far. After three months of hard work, without any money, without any support – this is a big achievement for us, our farmers, all of Sabeto, and all other farmers who will soon join us," he said.

Mr. Rai encouraged farmers not to wait for government assistance.

"We didn't ask anyone to help us, we wanted to do this on our own. We know assistance will come later on, especially with COVID-19 and the problems that came with it.

"If people will continue to depend on government all the time, they will keep sitting and waiting for help. Instead of waiting, we did it on our own in three months; we did it, day and night.

"After seeing this, many people can do it in the village. It's not that it will affect our business but I want people to do it so more people can plant."

Ministry Advocates Food Security to Youths

Securing the nation's food security now and for the future requires the engagement of our youth.

This was shared to youth during the recent International Youth Day celebrations at Nausori Village with youth engagement and development remaining a key priority of the Fijian Government.

In aligning with this year's theme "Youth Engagement for Global Action" and the sub-theme of the Central/Eastern Division celebrations - "Food Security", the Ministry of Agriculture provided hands-on training on best agriculture practices to attending youths.

Additionally, the Ministry provided planting materials of resilient crops to youth groups during the celebration as part of its contributions.

"The Ministry provided 500 cassava cuttings, 500 dalo toppings and dried vegetable seedlings which will assist the youths engage more effectively in socio-economic activities that will develop their potential," said Senior Agriculture Officer Naitasiri Mr. Apenisa

Rarasea.

"As for the planting materials, our officers will be with the youths and youth groups and be part of the hands-on training and will be distributed amongst the youth groups."

Participating youth Manasa Cakaunitabua said he was grateful that youth were remembered as engines of change around the globe.

"In recognizing the potential of youth, that we can create impactful and productive decisions for our livelihoods despite the numerous challenges we are facing today, for that I would like to thank the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Agriculture," he said.

"Learning to plant for food security is a bonus as we have resources that we can make use of and to develop what we are capable of to realize our true value as young people of Fiji," said Manasa.

Meanwhile, the youths of the Central/ Eastern division were encouraged to take an organized approach considering the impacts of the current pandemic in terms of food

security.

This was the message shared by Minister for Youth and Sports Hon. Parveen Bala while officiating at the celebrations.

"For the Fijian Government, not only the engagement but the development of our youth has been a priority.

"Fiji is experiencing the effects of climate change, including worsening coastal erosion and floods, this sure has the impact on food security, unless action is taken climate change will drastically affect our food security," he said.

"Therefore the event will provide the much needed awareness to ensure we develop youths who are knowledgeable, proactive and resilient to the undeniably unprecedented changes that we are experiencing."

"Be the positive role models while being active and responsible citizens in taking care of yourselves, your families and also giving back to your communities for a food secure Fiji," said Minister Bala.



Youths from Central and Eastern Division planting dalo for food security.

Ministry assists Ridge to Reef project

Communities living within priority water catchments on the two main islands of Fiji have found a solution to challenges they face such as flooding, upstream sedimentation, poaching, and sand mining through the Ridge to Reef project.

Aimed at improving the livelihoods, watershed management, and opportunities through local actions to conserve and rehabilitate their environments, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project areas include the Waidina, Ba, Tuva, Labasa, Vanuiva and Tunuloa catchments.

The Land Use section of the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with other Government agencies, civil society organizations and NGOs, stakeholders, private sectors, resource owners, and local groups, University of the South Pacific and Pacific Community (SPC) is currently implementing this project.

Senior Research Officer (Land Use Planning) of the Ministry of Agriculture Solomon Nagaunavou said the Ridge to Reef project is targeted at preserving the biodiversity and ecosystem services of communities.

"The Ministry of Agriculture has a role to play in this project and the Land Use section is working in partnership with these other agencies to preserve biodiversity, provide ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve climate resilience, reduce poverty and sustain livelihoods," he said.

The Land Use Planning Section of the Ministry of Agriculture under this project plays a pivotal role in the six identified catchments through land use planning, hands-on community awareness, and advocating on adaptable low-cost agroforestry systems.

"This includes driving change in practices and behavior of farmers towards more sustainable practices,

especially soil conservation; and more resilient farming system," said Mr. Nagaunavou.

"Equally critical is the extension role with farmers in the respective project catchments, the Ministry is to ensure better soil conservation farming practices, notably on sloping land and to develop its work in a holistic and participatory approach.

"Together with the Ministry of Forestry, we have identified and mapped the highest priority sites for reforestation and restoration, including zones subject to regular flooding and areas prone to soil erosion," he said.

"Also, we've identified sites for on-farm integrated landscape management practices and held consultations with farmers and the communities and have led the development of community land use plans based on the area's land-use capability," said Mr. Nagaunavou.



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy at one of the Ridge to Reef model farm within the Ba catchment during the World Day to Combat Desertification.