

## LOCAL FARMERS RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FROM NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT



New Zealand High Commissioner to Fiji H.E Jonathan Curr and First Secretary at the New Zealand High Commission Ms. Sally Waswo with Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Ritesh Dass at Nacocolevu Research Station

250 farmers from Sigatoka who were affected by TC Harold earlier this year have recently benefited from the distribution of seedling packages donated by New Zealand's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT). The seedling package assistance was made possible through the support of the New Zealand government in collaboration with Nature's Way

Cooperative (Fiji) Ltd, targeted towards further rehabilitating affected farmers.

The handing over was held at the Ministry of Agriculture's Nacocolevu Research Station in Sigatoka on Thursday (05.11.20) and was handed over by New Zealand's High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Jonathan Curr to Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. Ritesh Dass.

The seedling packages included commodities such as Okra, Long Bean, Cabbages, Eggplant, Papaya, and Tomato.

While acknowledging the

New Zealand government's support through this seedling assistance, PS Dass said the contribution would go a long way towards achieving some of the Ministry's priority initiatives geared toward securing sustainable food and nutrition for all Fijians.

Following TC Harold, the Fijian Government estimated the total cost of damage at around \$100million.

The Agriculture Sector alone recorded total damages of more than \$28million, and 90 percent of this amount was damages to crops. A total of 3,341 hectares of crop land were devastated with approximately 1,986 livestock farms being affected, inclusive of livestock loss.

"This significant loss not only impacts food security but the overall livelihood of farmers who depend on it," PS Dass remarked.

"In response to the current pandemic and TC Harold, the Ministry has considered two

key strategies that will ensure agriculture sector expansion and growth. This plan will enable Fiji's Agriculture Sector to meet its demand as the backbone of Fiji's economy," he said.

The initiatives include; distribution of home gardening seed packages, improving village rice production and supply, ensuring household long-term food security, enhancement of village/Settlement poultry meat supplementation, farm response packages, the establishment of large commercial ventures, the establishment of Orchards and Nurseries, and support medium to large livestock farmers.

"The importance of agriculture for food and income security has never been critical than it is now. This is exemplified in these trying times in light of COVID-19. Agriculture has been the mainstay of our economy and will continue to do so in the unforeseeable future," said Mr. Dass.

## COUPLES GRADUATE FROM TUTU TRAINING CENTRE



PS Dass with couple graduates of Tutu Training Centre in Taveuni

Graduating from an institution that has holistically prepared agricultural enthusiasts to take on the technical aspects of farming is a privilege in and of itself.

This was the message relayed to twelve graduating couples who recently completed their six-month training from the Tutu

Training Centre (TTC) in Taveuni.

While officiating at the graduation ceremony on 22 October 2020 in Taveuni, Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass acknowledged the effort shown by the graduands, who undertook TTC's Couples Program to help boost productivity in their

respective farms.

"Agriculture in Fiji is a family activity, especially in rural and peri-urban areas where agriculture is commonly practiced.

"I must personally applaud Tutu for designing this initiative, which ensures the sustainability of family farming in Fiji. Family

and small farms are vital to our economy and well-being as a nation," he said.

PS Dass said that not only did farming support the sustainability of rural and farm economies, it also served to protect and enhance natural resources, the environment and helped to maintain rural populations.

"The 2017 Population Census recorded 884,887 persons in Fiji, living in 193,196 households. Out of which 61% are still engaged in agriculture activities (crops, livestock, and fishing) and around 57% of household members are engaged in Crop & Land tasks alone."

Mr. Dass also highlighted some opportunities that the Ministry of Agriculture had refocused and designed its plans to respond and ensure the sustainability of the sector amidst the current global pandemic, which inadvertently led to a large number of the populace taking up agricultural activities of various types.

Some of the initiatives that the Ministry was pursuing as part of its growth plan included the upgrading of farm access roads to enhance connectivity and access to markets, contractual farming with the Agricultural Marketing Authority, household long term food security plan, household

meat supplementation, financial inclusion – registration of farmers with the Fiji National Provident Fund and the Bank of the South Pacific, promotion of agro-processing and value addition, promotion of organic agriculture through the use of organic fertilizers and farming practices and the introduction of Soil Health Cards to farmers to ensure proper soil management practices that will improve soil health and crop yield.

Tutu Training Centre has been in operation for over 40 years and the Fijian Government has been part of that journey since 1972 when it first provided Grant through the then Ministry of Primary Industry as financial assistance for the development of young agriculture enthusiasts.

The Ministry of Agriculture has over the years partnered with Tutu Training Centre through financial support. For the last three years, more than \$1.8million has been allocated as funding to Tutu Training Centre, which has enabled the school to provide learning and development opportunities for young farmers.

Meanwhile, Permanent Secretary Dass also launched the Tutu Training Centre website which can be accessed at <http://tutufiji.com/>