

AMA LAUNCHES WAITO FARMS



(From Left) CEO AMA-Mr Alvin Singh, (3rd from left) Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Permanent Secretary for Agriculture - Mr Ritesh Dass with Waito contracted farmers

The Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA) has successfully secured an 800-tonne order for Ginger.

Given the volume of the order, the AMA had been looking for Farmer Clusters to ensure a consistent supply at the right price. AMA was also on the lookout for demonstrated commitment and dedication from potential Farmer Clusters.

The locality also needed to be chosen with care, due to the planting requirements of the green ginger.

After speaking to multiple interested clusters, the AMA has finally awarded

the task of growing this produce to Waito Farms Pte Limited.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy launched the initiative at Waito Farms in Tailevu last week whereby he thanked the Directors of Waito Farms Pte Limited for coming on board to plant Ginger, Duruka, Dalo, and Chillies for the AMA.

Along with Waito Farms, he will be launching some other commercial farms and more Farmer Clusters will be coming on board as contracted farmers with the Fiji Agromarketing in the

coming weeks.

"I am very happy that the villagers from Waito Village will benefit from the operations of Waito Farms Pte Limited as it will mean secured employment for them. They will now find employment in their locality rather than having to travel long distances to find employment," said Minister Reddy.

"I would like to urge the Directors of the Waito Farms to ensure that the produce is planted and grown on time, good husbandry practices are ensured, and that the produce is appropriately

handled during the harvesting process. This could lead to the Waito Farms getting more orders to grow more quantity of these produce."

"The Ministry of Agriculture is providing all the planting materials to Waito Farms, who are expected to return these seeds in 3 years. In addition, our Ministry will also provide technical assistance for this project too," he added.

In acknowledging the commitment made by the AMA and the Ministry of Agriculture, one of the Directors of Waito Farms Pte Limited, Mr. Hirdesh

Prasad stated that the guaranteed commitment to take all the produce, price commitment, and that too at the Farm Gate level was what convinced the Waito Farms directors to plant the targeted crop for the AMA.

"It would have not been possible if the guaranteed commitment was not there. This is evidence that the Fiji Agromarketing is putting their plans into action to assist its contracted farmers in getting access to the relevant markets," said Mr. Prasad.

Mr. Prasad thanked Minister Reddy for the foresight through the various Ministry of Agriculture initiatives geared towards making agriculture a billion-dollar industry in Fiji.

He also thanked the CEO of AMA, Mr. Alvin Sharma, for his leadership in taking AMA to greater heights and showed his confidence that the AMA would now reach new levels of success.

He suggested that other Farmer Clusters should also come on board with the AMA as this was a great opportunity for them to improve their livelihoods; "The Farmer Clusters also need to understand that the Farmer Contract concept is a partnership where they will also need to provide necessary resources such as getting land prepared, farms cultivated, and not expect everything on a grant from the Ministry of Agriculture," said Mr. Prasad.

AMA MAKES PAYMENTS FOR FARMERS EASIER WITH VODAFONE M-PAISA



From Left: PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass, Vodafone Head of eCommerce & Corporate Affairs - Mr. Shailendra Prasad and AMA CEO - Mr. Alvin Singh during the Vodafone M-PAiSA agreement signing.

Fiji's commercial large scale farming has made a breakthrough announcement today after AMA Chief Executive Officer, Alvin Sharma, signed an agreement for Vodafone Fiji's M-PAiSA mobile money to be used as an official payment channel.

The cashless payment method will enable Fiji Agro Marketing to pay its registered farmers directly through their mobile phones. M-PAiSA is a safe, secure, and highly efficient payment method that will take away the risk of carrying large amounts of cash – both for Fiji Agro Marketing and the farmers.

"Vodafone's M-PAiSA cashless payment through mobile phone is fast becoming the new normal in the Fijian economy," said Mr. Ritesh Dass – Permanent Secretary for Agriculture.

"Even though paying with cash is still predominant in Fiji, in most developed markets, cash is fast losing its prominence as cashless and electronic payments become the new norm. The global COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of contactless cashless payments as a safer way to pay."

"The Ministry has been looking for innovative ways to streamline the

payments process which involved large sums of money being transacted on site of delivery. This new electronic payment method is instant, safe, secure, and eliminates the hassle of carrying large amounts of hard cash and associated risks," said Mr. Dass.

"This decision by Fiji Agro Marketing is most timely and highly commendable."

The farmers supplying to Fiji Agro Marketing will first need to be registered for M-PAiSA to receive payments through this channel.

There is no cost to register and maintain an M-PAiSA account. Once payment is received by the farmers, they can use other M-PAiSA cashless payment options such as paying their water and EFL bills, paying their workers, and even do their shopping without the need to withdraw cash.

Vodafone's Head of eCommerce & Corporate Affairs, Mr. Shailendra Prasad said; "We are delighted to partner with Fiji Agro Marketing in this cashless payment revolution and offer additional benefits to both our customers.

Several additional payment services through M-PAiSA are available to users at no cost to users such as water and electricity bill payments, purchasing airline tickets, movie tickets, and paying for grocery shopping at major supermarkets Fiji wide.

A lot more businesses are now joining the cashless revolution as people realize the need for online platforms and cashless payments."

FIJI'S FIRST STATE OF THE ART GREENHOUSE TO BE ESTABLISHED

A brand new state of the art greenhouse will soon be established at the Ministry of Agriculture's Koronivia Research Station (KRS), the first to be built for the Ministry.

This has been made possible through partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFIL), underscoring the importance of enhancing Fiji's food security preparedness. The total project is expected to cost over CAD210,000 (FJD339,272) and will be completed over 8 months.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic exposing the vulnerabilities of the global economy, while underscoring the importance of food security, managing food security risks and the urgent need to remain adaptive and forward looking, the Greenhouse project is earmarked to alleviate some of these key challenges locally.

This project enhances food security preparedness through a stable and accessible supply chain for seeds and planting material in Fiji through 3 main objectives;

- i. Building a bio-secured climate-controlled greenhouse facility to increase productivity of Government's central crop nursery, promote multiplication, adaptive crops and to secure the supply chain for seedlings throughout the country at all times;
- ii. Building a strong information network of crop nurseries nationwide, and;
- iii. Support research capacity including 22 female research staff. Currently, the KRS nursery is es-

entially a field nursery containing over 60 crop varieties and doubles as a multiplication centre, with the Research Station being a key repository for food security supplying seedlings throughout Fiji.

However, its field nursery is directly exposed to extreme weather risks, with significant loss of nursery planting materials during extreme weather events. Climate change risks will continue to present major risks for Fiji's food security and national economy.

It is estimated that cyclones and flood losses also translate into an average of 25,700 people being pushed into poverty every year in Fiji.

With over 70% of Fiji's agricultural households being reliant on subsistence agriculture, Government crop nurseries are, and will continue to be a vital repository and a supplier of crop material.

In the long-term, the Greenhouse Project is anticipated to provide a stable repository and supply chain comprising public, private and farmer nurseries that provide local seeds and planting material at all times; with an expected increase in crop yield and overall productivity due to healthy and resilient crops.

Additionally, accredited greenhouse/crop nurseries including the KRS, public and private nurseries, that act as first responders during times of natural crisis will be strengthened and will also see the increased participation of women in agriculture, management and agricultural science fields.