

“EXPORTERS AN INTEGRAL PART OF SECTOR” - MINISTER REDDY



Exporters during their meeting at Legalega Research Station, Nadi with the Ministry of Agriculture Officials.

The role of exporters in the agriculture sector is an integral one as the need to provide markets to farmers and agro-producers is critical.

This was relayed by Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy when meeting exporters at Legalega Research Station in Nadi, “As exporters, you are a market and I urge you to provide markets to our farmers, there should be market signals to them that their produce will be purchased.

Hon. Reddy added that the issue of contracting farmers was to secure their markets, while also prompting them to focus on treating their farms as businesses.

He shared the need for more value-addition to Fijian primary commodities that could target niche export markets; “We’re here

to grow the agriculture sector together and to pick up the excess that the farmers have and to market it out because we’re targeting on making the agriculture sector become the leading sector of the economy.”

Hon. Reddy also elaborated the role of the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA), stating that the institution not be viewed as a competitor for exporters, but rather, as potential suppliers to exporters if needed.

“The AMA is not here to compete with exporters, we are here to grow the sector and to make agriculture the backbone of the economy but we need to grow together and bring foreign exchange to the country,” said Hon. Reddy.

He has also urged exporters to assist their farmers and suppliers

to become members of the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) to help secure their livelihoods.

He highlighted that through the Contractual Farming program under the AMA, farmers would now be socially secure; “When Tropical Cyclone Winston hit, all who were affected could access their FNPF to help them rebuild. Farmers could not go then because they were not members of the FNPF, but through the contracted commercial farmers agreement, they are now eligible for FNPF deductions.”

Exporters met with senior management of the Ministry of Agriculture to express their concerns and views and to highlight the issues they faced, especially in light of COVID-19.

CONTRACTUAL FARMING INITIATIVE GATHERS MOMENTUM

The recently announced Contractual Farming initiative of the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) is receiving positive feedback through growing farmer interest.

Last week in Kavanagasau, Sigatoka eleven (11) farmers signed contracts with the AMA, committing 39.5 acres of their land for the planting of cassava, duruka, eggplants and chillies.

The newly contracted farmers, who are from Kavanagasau and neighbouring Nabitu, are existing farmers, and have signed up with the AMA to compliment their produce and earn much needed income for themselves.

While launching the Kavanagasau Salad Bowl Farmers Cluster, and presiding over the contract signing, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the agriculture sector was an integral part of the Fijian economy and farmers had the potential to leverage it to its rightful place.

“We need to grow the agriculture sector, we can’t always invest in the same 100 farmers and in order to grow the sector, we need to encourage more participation from farmers, increasing genuine farmer numbers by the thousands and more,” said Hon. Minister.

He elaborated over the last eight weeks, momentum had been gained in terms of mobilizing the household sector to practice home gardening, bringing the small available land around ordinary

Fijian households into farming.

Hon. Reddy highlighted the Ministry distributed over 36,000 home gardening packages containing seeds of 6-12 different crops, ensuring access to food of acceptable quality and nutritional value.

“I want to thank the entire household sector in Fiji for joining the Ministry of Agriculture in this journey to mobilize them to get the vacant land around their home into production.

The newly contracted Kavanagasau Salad Bowl Farmers Cluster were also challenged to grow as an enterprise, and to effectively contribute towards ensuring the agriculture sector became the backbone of Fiji’s economy.

Speaking on behalf of the Kavanagasau Salad Bowl Farmers Cluster, Mr. Joseph Hill acknowledged the commitment shown by the Ministry of Agriculture and the AMA, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are very thankful that we have been provided with seeds and cuttings at no cost, we are really thankful for this,” said Mr. Hill.

“This initiative is a welcome one for us farmers because we now have opportunities that we didn’t have before,” he said.

The Contractual Farming initiative provides farmers a formal commitment for the purchase of their produce and eliminates the worry they previously had regarding the sale of their produce.

ORGANIC BACTERIUM LAUNCHED



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Sigatoka farmers and Senior Agriculture Officials during the launching of the Bacterium Culture in Nacocolevu.

The introduction of organic agriculture into Fiji’s production system is the best option to ensure the sustainability of our natural resources.

This was shared by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the launch of the Organic Bacterium fertilizer at the Ministry of Agriculture’s Sigatoka Research Station.

Organic agriculture as defined by Organics International is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological

processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects.

Minister Reddy said organic fertilizers were a kinder, gentler way to give plants the nutrients they need and its benefits include;

1. The release of nutrients at a more slower pace in the soil when needed by the plant, making them long lasting;
2. The nutrients are contained in complex molecules that won’t leach away with the first rain;

3. They are less likely to burn the young roots of seedlings, and;
4. They enhance soil health by nurturing (or at least not harming) the soil microbes that help make soil nutrients available to plants.

“Even large plantations of cash crops like cocoa and coconut, kava and vegetables are facing risks of environmental degradation of epic proportions,” said Hon. Reddy

A component of the organic bacterium fertilizer launched today is the use of Lactobacillus, a

facultative anaerobic bacteria, which fortifies fertilizers and when put in the soil, immensely improves cultivation.

“It also allows for slow release of nutrients found in the rhizosphere to be absorbed by the plants slowly over time. The roots become healthy and exudates composition dependent and disease suppressive soil allowing for progressive soil remediation,” said Minister Reddy.

“This fermented fertilizer improves the growth of plants when applied as foliar spray to seedlings and soil or compost drench. It also

improves their efficacy in up-taking nutrients so naturally, growth is enhanced,” Hon. Reddy said.

However with the use of these microorganisms, the micro and macro nutrients spray or drench to feed the plants become more present and easily absorbable by the plants; this is a consequence of the increased efficiency of nutrients.

On the farm, Lactobacillus acts as the soil probiotic, making it a perfect medium for organic farming. It populates in the soil and staves out pathogens.



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with senior officials of AMA and Ministry of Agriculture during the Kavanagasau launching.