

AGRICULTURE Newsletter



December Issue 2021

Message from the Hon. Minister for
Agriculture, Waterways and Environment
page 1

Message from the Assistant Minister
page 2

Message from the Head of HRD&S
page 3

Message from the Acting Chief Economist
page 4

Unsung Heroes: Minister Reddy Applauds
Officers for COVID-19 Lockdown work
page 5

New Seeds and Processing Storage Unit
Launched for Ministry of Agriculture
page 6

Awards Nite for the Nadroga/Navosa Team
page 7

MoA Recognizes Staff Contributions at the
Awards Night
page 8

Photo Gallery
page 9

MERRY
Christmas

And Happy New Year

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, WATERWAYS AND ENVIRONMENT



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

Dear Colleagues!

Season's greetings!

As we head towards this festive season and review what we've achieved as a Ministry, I wish to take this time to acknowledge all of you for your great efforts in ensuring the sector remained poised for continued growth and development, despite the numerous hurdles, obstacles and daunting challenges that were laid out in front of us.

Yet I am enlightened by the fact that we faced these challenges head on and turned out obvious victors in the end.

However, we have not yet escaped the clutches of COVID-19 as it still continues to grapple the economy, and we are slowly but surely returning to some sense of normalcy.

In light of this, I wish to take time out to turn the spotlight on you, the unsung heroes of the Ministry of Agriculture who stood tall and helped to muster the steering wheel amidst turbulent waters, we came out on the other end generating more than \$100million in foreign revenue through the exports of our fresh/chilled agriculture produce. I can't thank you enough for your

tremendous input towards our achieving this milestone.

We trudged through this path over these past three years and it has been long in the making, 2021 has been a challenging year, to say the least, but we've overcome it nonetheless and I take my hats off to your unwavering support throughout the year.

As we set our sights on the collective aspirations of the Ministry to "Grow Beyond", and as an entity and arm of the Fijian Government, the momentum of this grandiose movement is heavily dependent on our will to churn out our best in all that we do. It is a holistic approach that requires all hands on deck to bring to fruition. We can, and we will "Grow Beyond".

During this festive season, I wish to send you season's greetings from my office to you and yours, enjoy responsibly and return reinvigorated to take up the challenge once more, to make our agriculture sector the true backbone of our economy.

From my family to yours, may you have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

MESSAGE FROM THE ASSISTANT MINISTER



Hon. Viam Pillay
Assistant Minister for Agriculture

I bring greeting to you all.

Once again the festive season for 2021 is upon us.

We have come to the end of another year and it is timely for us to pause and reflect upon the year that is about to end. It has not been an easy time – many of our colleagues have retired and some will soon leave us at the end of this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your contribution in 2021. In particular, for your stewardship and support during the year.

The fundamental essence of the message of Christmas is that man should be reconciled to and with God and Christmas celebration is one of giving, bring good cheer to the poor, the widows, the orphans, the lost, the marginalized, the unsaved and the needy – physically, socially, economically and spiritually.

In keeping with the spirit of Christmas, I appeal to you all to spend quality time with members of your families during this festive season. We all need to do this. Just feasting and merry making is not enough.

We need to thank each of our family for their support during the year. They have contributed so much to our achievements. They are part of us, we are a family. Their support and loyalty need to be acknowledged – as they have stood-by us in good times as well as in difficult times. To all of them, a very warm and sincere thank you.

For those of us who will continue to serve into the New Year, the message I wish to share with you with this Festive Season is a “message of hope”, we should continue to work together as a team, to be one in spirit, purpose and intent. As we work in challenging times I do ask for your perseverance, to give your best and work smart for the sake of our children and our country. If there was a time to crystallize our patriotism it is now. The true and dedicated worker will use the difficulties faced as a motivation to do more, rather than using them as an excuse to grumble, sit back and do nothing.

May I wish each one of you as well as your families a very Merry Christmas and a Prosperous and safe New Year.

May God Bless You All.

MESSAGE FROM THE PERMANENT SECRETARY



Dr. Vinesh Kumar
Permanent Secretary for Agriculture

This is a Christmas that I can truly say is one I am looking forward to for the sole reason that it was the most abnormal and difficult year the Ministry has faced in the last two decades I have worked here. However, the upcoming festivities are certainly a sign of better things to come along with the re-opening of our international borders.

We went through a new norm with the months of lockdown due to the community transmission of COVID-19, and sadly, amid this, we also lost a few of our staff and close family members. The pandemic brought

losses to all Fijians without exception – the lives and health of loved ones, jobs and security, the freedom to move and interact. We were also reminded of how interconnected we all are and the world is just one island.

Certainly, the year 2021 was a trying time for the Ministry and for what we always cherished, our ‘MOA family’. But, we as a Ministry continued and kept adapting to the new norm.

We never stopped; adhering to strict COVID-19 safety protocols, we continued providing much-needed support to the overall-government machinery to tackle the pandemic. I must wholeheartedly thank every officer of the Ministry and especially those front liners for their sacrifice, putting their lives on the line, each and every time to keep us all safe.

At the early stages of the lockdown under the guidance of our Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy, we refocused and re-strategized on how we operated as a Ministry that is empowered to provide food and nutrition security to the nation.

We revisited our ongoing interventions and created the Home Gardening Program and Farm Support Package; two comprehensive initiatives that go beyond emergency food distribution to address self-sufficiency and long-term resilience for the Fijian people. As team MOA, we became more innovative and smarter in our approach to addressing chal-

lenges amid lockdowns. Operation Green Link, Operation Westcross and #AgriSafe Bubble were some of our own innovations.

There is, however, some good that came out of the event. Despite the impact of COVID-19, the agricultural export sector performed extremely well. We recorded a significant increase in volume as well as in the value of agriculture exports of fresh and chilled produce to New Zealand, Australia, and the United States.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work put in by our farmers, producers and exporters for this remarkable achievement. It was a year that many of us saw increased efficiency in how we do things such as virtual meetings and working from home part of the new normal. Virtual meetings significantly reduced travel/fuel costs which in turn reduced our carbon footprint.

This Christmas is worth remembering because the agricultural sector emerged as one of the economic and social heroes of the year. During this festive season of giving, let us take time to slow down and enjoy the simple things.

May this wonderful time of the year touch your heart in a special way.

I extend my best wishes to the MOA family and wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF HRD&S



Mr. Ben Chand
Head of Human Resources Development & Services

Season's Greetings to you. It is the time of year when we kick off our shoes, reflect on the successes of the past year, and plan our goals.

2021 has been a challenging yet eventful year. Despite the lockdowns due to COVID 19, the spirits of achievement was not dampened.

The year began with rehabilitation for TC Yasa and before we realized, we were again stormed by TC Ana in late January. Just as we began to gather, we were again challenged by COVID 19. While there were staff working from home, others continuously within the workspace bubbles paved their way in ensuring service delivery for the Ministry was not compromised. The assiduous efforts of mending the borders to seed distribution, driving every initiative taken up by the Ministry, we appreciate everyone's efforts in making these a success.

We lost 10 staff to non-vaccination, it was a hard call to make but safety was our priority and I would like to thank each and every staff for getting fully vaccinated and ensuring that our workplace continues to be a safe one.

From hundreds of new recruits, to implementing Human Resource Information Systems (HRMIS), several contract renewal, trainings and awareness, we continue to serve both you- our employees and our external stakeholders. MOA was the first Ministry to have launched the FICAC Anti - Bribery Campaign and trainings will continue in all regions.

As we end the year, another milestone in the history of MOA was marked where the staff were recognized during the MOA Staff Annual Awards. There were six categories of awards from each division and all staff who have served over 20 years with the Ministry were issued appreciation certificates to honor and thank them for their service and contribution.

Of course, this is a first to the many and we look forward to your usual support and cooperation.

I appreciate all you have done this year, and look forward to a new year filled with determination and vigor. To each of you, we thank you for your commitment all year long. As we spend time with our families, I hope you are spending quality time with those you love, creating memories and living your lives to the fullest.

Your hard work and relentless effort have made the organization to be where it is today. Wishing you a Merry Christmas & a prosperous new year.

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCH



Mr. Shalendra Prasad
Head of Agriculture Research

We have once again come to the end of yet another year. As we all celebrate this festive season, we remember our staff and their families and thank each other for all their contributions and dedication in moving the Research Division forward.

Christmas is a special time of the year for gathering with friends and families to celebrate and enjoy the season. I encourage you all to spend more time with your families this season to appreciate their contribution towards our work.

This year has been a challenging year for most of us. Despite many challenges we were able to produce some significant results to help move Fiji's agricultural sector

forward. This was only possible through team work and commitment. Your faithfulness and cheerful spirits will keep us moving forward as a team. As we come to the end of another year, let's learn from our weakness and make necessary adjustments to improve and move forward together and produce better results next year.

I appreciate all that you have done throughout the year. We are a great team.

Wishing you and your family a cheerful and wonderful Christmas blessed with happiness and feast. May you all be blessed with prosperity and smiles in the year ahead.

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF FINANCE



Mr. Ajay Singh
Head of Finance

My Dear Colleagues,

This year has challenged us with Tropical Cyclones and the unprecedented impact of COVID 19.

We have been through these uncertain times not knowing what lies ahead of us, we have supported each other and this year has been fruitful because you are our co-workers.

You have, through it all, worked tirelessly together and we spend more time working together as a team, seek each other's assistance and support, eat together, share memories together and much more. We help build the Agriculture sector and this

nation together.

To those of you who are part of this journey, you have worked hard and you really deserve to have a wonderful Christmas this year. It has been a pleasure working with you and I wish you a very Happy New year!

Please enjoy responsibly with your families and remember that Christmas is a time of family get together, sharing peace and Joy!

May your Christmas be special and fruitful too!

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING CHIEF ECONOMIST



Ms. Sera Bose
Acting Chief Economist

Dear All

It goes without saying that the past year has been very challenging for the Ministry both professionally and personally having to adapt to so many changes to our ways of working and our ways of life.

Throughout the pandemic, we encountered ever-changing circumstances that has not only taught us valuable lessons but has brought us closer as a force to be reckon with.

Amid the uncertainty and the obstacles that this year has brought and being able

to successfully rise to these challenges has been inspiring. Your commitment and support have made all the difference and I sincerely thank all staff for another wonderful year, full of excitement and possibility.

On that note, it is my heartfelt wishes that this Christmas Season will bring you and your families enough joy and laughter to last a lifetime.

God Bless.

MERRY CHRISTMAS & PROSPEROUS 2022!

EP&S WRAPS UP 2021 DOING COMMUNITY WORK

The staff from the Economic Planning & Statistics Division (EP&S) took time out for community work and planted ten fruit trees at Sabeto, Nadi. The initiative was part of their end of the year wrap-up of work activities.



UNSUNG HEROES: MINISTER REDDY APPLAUDS OFFICERS FOR COVID-19 LOCKDOWN WORK

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy thanked the staff of his Ministry for going over and above the call of duty that contributed to the growth of the sector amidst the COVID-19 lockdowns this year.

Hon. Dr Reddy took time out on 1 December to commend and thank all staff of the Ministry who had, in one way or another, ensured service delivery continued at optimal levels.

As such, the Ministry of Agriculture also dedicated the month of December to its staff to recognize their efforts with a Certificate of Appreciation to follow through and serve the farming communities despite the risk of contracting the COVID-19 virus.

"We were one of the Ministry's that was not closed. Our staff operated from home, from the borders and from the regional offices to ensure work was done. There were no excuses for not delivering services on time because the expectations placed on our Ministry from our farmers and affected Fijians was more, as we were one of the Ministry's at the forefront during the pandemic," the Minister said.

"What we deliver on the ground, matters. The rest of the input such as how much time we spent in meetings and writing papers - at the end of the day what mattered was output. Outputs are the individual Ministry's deliverables. Those on the ground look up to us to provide guidance," he added.

"Rain or shine, you managed to complete the work, leaving your families behind and waking up early in the morning to reach the borders to serve the people. Moreover, our staff went out of their way to help farmers to transport their produce to the borders, sell it, and take the money back to their families."

Dr Reddy said these officers manned the borders daily for long hours to ensure a smooth transfer of fresh produce from the West to Suva.

"The extent to which our staff worked at the borders till late at night and again at 4am the next morning every day, just to ensure those trucks carrying fresh produce was able to cross was admirable and sadly, not appreciated. These officers took shifts to ensure there were no issues for these farmers' harvests to get across. They liaised with the police, with other government agencies, on a daily basis just so that Fijians in locked down areas would have their fresh produce," he explained.

The Hon. Dr Reddy said like operations of this magnitude in which it was a whole of government response, issues arose at the borders.

The Minister added there were cases where there were no passes for the trucks to cross over. In others, vegetables had been harvested and within the hour, a COVID case was detected and the area was locked down. He added the farmer questioned what he was to do next with his harvest, fearing that he would lose money.

"Our staff, who had a license, drove the truck to the other side of the border to pass it to the supplier waiting on the other side, just so that the truck could pass through. Our officers were there every day to help facilitate and transfer the produce so farmers would not make a loss," he said.

Further, the Minister said the staff were the unsung heroes during this recent pandemic who should be commended for their tireless efforts that helped keep Fijians fed.

Dr Reddy said these were the strategies the Ministry implemented when COVID-19 struck to ensure that Fijians continued to have access to food, whether it was either grown or brought to them.

"I want to join the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture to thank you all, all staff around Fiji. As our unsung heroes, we're here to celebrate,

recognize and acknowledge all your efforts," he said.

These officers, some of whom were locked out of their usual stations, were part of the frontline workers together with their counterparts from various Government Ministries and Departments to undertake COVID-19 operations like contact tracing, and food/ration distribution, awareness drives and screenings.



NEW SEEDS AND PROCESSING STORAGE UNIT LAUNCHED FOR MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE



Minister of Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy launches new Seed Processing and Storage Unit in Sigatoka.

The Fiji Ministry of Agriculture launched its Seeds Processing and Storage Unit gifted to the ministry under the New Zealand funded Pacific Seeds for Life (PS4L) programme at its Sigatoka, Fiji Research Station on 20 December.

Coordinated by The Pacific Community (SPC) Land Resources Division, in collaboration with the Manaaki Whenua - Landcare Research, the PS4L programme helps to address the food and nutrition security in vulnerable communities in the Pacific, in addition to developing sustainable seed systems.

The processing and storage unit will assist the Sigatoka Research Station to process open pollinated seeds and bulk up on their quantity of seeds for distribution to local farming communities.

Minister of Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the support from development partners SPC and the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), will pave the way in further improving the infrastructure, facilities and equipment used to process open pollinated seeds at the research station.

"The future plan now is the commercialisation of seed production. As you know seeds are very important for agricultural development. In terms of collaboration with SPC and MFAT we are looking at introducing new varieties and new lines of open pollinated seeds to extend our diversity of seeds so farmers have a better choice in selecting from a variety of crops."

SPC LRD Director Karen Mapusua added that local governments will play a key role in

supporting the scale-up of activities under the PS4L programme.

"The major outcome of the programme is the development of sustainable seed systems for Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, who are all beneficiaries of the PS4L programme. In Fiji, the PS4L programme will work closely with the Sigatoka Research Station, Koronivia Research Station and Tutu Rural Training Centre in Taveuni."

MFAT Second Secretary Political Courtney Rose said it was pleasing to see the progress made under the PS4L programme under the stewardship of SPC and Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research.

"Ensuring that farmers have access to good quality and virus free planting materials is vitally important for improving their yields and incomes. And there has never been a more important time to do so than right now as Fiji continues to recover from another incredibly tough year for many following the COVID-19 outbreak."

The seed processing and storage unit is earmarked to not only benefit Fiji, but the region, especially neighbouring island countries that may want to pursue a similar seed program.

Pacific Seeds for Life (PS4L) is a NZ funded integrated programme implemented by the Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research (MWLR) in partnership with the Land Resources Division (LRD) of SPC.

NEW MUA HYBRID COCONUT VARIETY RELEASED



Minister of Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Agriculture Officials and Farmers during the launching of Mua Coconut variety in Taveuni.

An early fruit-bearing coconut variety was released by the Ministry of Agriculture as part of efforts to boost coconut production for local and international markets.

The newly released Mua Hybrid Coconut variety was released by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon.

Dr. Mahendra Reddy at the Ministry's Mua Research Station in Taveuni.

While officiating at the event, Minister Reddy said the release of this new variety was a remarkable achievement for the Ministry as the project was constantly affected by natural disasters, taking a toll on the trial area.

"This is a remarkable day and an achievement for the Ministry because this project was halted due to Tropical Cyclone Emi in 2003 as well as during other cyclones because our entire plantation of hybrid trees continued to be destroyed but we were able to revamp it and today signifies the efforts behind our research team here in Mua to get this variety released out to our farmers.

"This will do great service in terms of supporting farmers and exporters in terms of quickly getting the supply of larger volumes of coconut within a shorter period of time, and this Mua variety has been tested to do just that as compared to the Fiji Tall variety. It also has a reasonably long period of production, 40 years or so which isn't that bad when compared to the Fiji Tall variety," said Hon. Reddy.

"We want to boost the exports of both dried and green coconuts, there is an enormous demand for coconuts in the export market and we're also interested in growing the production and exports of green coconuts or bu because the market and demand for bu locally, through our tourism sector, and for the export market is huge," he added.

"Copra prices have risen, coconut oil prices have also seen a substantial increase in the market and we want to continue to push production and supply into the market," said Hon. Reddy.

He said some tree crops were long term but if proper research and innovation were done and shorter-term varieties of these tree crops were developed, then the Ministry of

Agriculture was doing its role to assist farmers, exporters and contribute to the economy.

The Research Division of the Ministry of Agriculture commenced with coconut breeding work in the early 1980s. Six different types of hybrids were developed and their characteristics evaluated over the years with this new Mua hybrid being the latest.

The Mua hybrid is an early fruit-bearing

variety at 3-4 years as compared to the Fiji Tall variety which bears fruit at 5-7 years. It is of medium height reaching 10m in 20 years as compared to Fiji Tall which reaches 20-25 meters. The Mua hybrid has a better yield advantage over Fiji Tall as it recorded 1.4tonnes/hectare of copra.

AWARDS NIGHT FOR THE NADROGA/NAVOSA TEAM



Nadroga Navosa staff during their Staff Awards in Nacocolevu, Sigatoka

Officers in the Nadroga/Navosa Province were recognized for their work during the year at their Awards Night on December 2 at the Nacocolevu Research Station. Principal Economic Planning Officer (Policy) Ms Alitiana Mua, who officiated at the ceremony thanked the staff for

their tireless service rendered during a difficult time with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"With the posts that you hold, please note that you all play a vital role in the Ministry and

we thank you all for your service in the work that you do and have done during the year," she said.

"The year was a challenging one with COVID hitting the country hard but you all held the fort for the Agriculture sector here in the Nadroga/Navosa province and we appreciate you all for that."

"We would also like to thank your individual families for the support at home bearing the hours you are away from home."

The Awards were for:

- Best Extension Employee - Varanisee Naiobasali
- Best Research Employee - Saawan Kumar
- Best AH&P Employee - Ravinesh Prasad Sharma
- Best Overall Female - Diana Nabou
- Best Overall Male - Samisoni Mocevuka

The Nadroga/Navosa Team wishes all the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture a Blessed Christmas and a Safe New Year's.



AUSTRALIAN VET VISITS LIVESTOCK OFFICES



AH&P staff with Dr Mark Schipp at Vatuwaqa office.

The Chief Veterinary Officer from Australia, Dr Mark Schipp visited the Animal Health and

Production Headquarters in Vatuwaqa on 8 December.

The visit was part of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment Pacific Engagement Program.

The focus of this program was to strengthen relationships with Biosecurity, Animal Health and Production and Capacity Building.

Dr Schipp said he was in Fiji to learn from the Ministry and support its work.

"But before I can do that, I need to understand the situation here and build a strong relationship with my counterparts. That is the purpose of these visits," he said.

The Ministry's Animal Health and Production, Principal Agriculture Officer and Officer in Charge, Mr Avinesh Dayal thanked Dr. Schipp for his visit and looked forward to working together.

Meanwhile Dr Schipp also visited Livestock Research and the Veterinary Laboratory at Koronivia Research Station.

Australia's Pacific Engagement Programs aims to safeguard animal health across the region by boosting its biosecurity systems and strengthening the multilateral organizations that support them.

MOA RECOGNIZES STAFF CONTRIBUTIONS AT AWARDS NIGHT



Minister for Agriculture-Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Agriculture Officials during the Awards

Three Ministry of Agriculture staff were specially recognized for their 35 years of long service – Deanny Douglas (34 years) and Setevano Lasei (34 years), and Sudhakar Prasad (35 years), during an Awards Night on Wednesday (22.12.21) in Suva.

In addition, 116 staff were also

acknowledged for serving over 20 years with the Ministry.

The Awards Night, held at Damodar Cinemas at Damodar City was attended by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy, Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Waterways

and Environment, Hon. Viam Pillay, and Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Vinesh Kumar.

Five categories of Awards were presented: Best Service Delivery, Leadership, Team Player, Milestones Achieved, and Job Excellence.

Best Service Delivery Award: Irene Chand, Matai Koroivuki, Graziela Ali, Adarshan Kumar, Meli Veikumuni, and Pritika Rischal.

Leadership Award: Amena Banuve, Sikeli Baleisuva, Sainiana Kirisitiana, Sandeep Sharma, and Mohammed Kadir.

Team Player Award: Shalendra Reddy, Abhelash Chand, Lavenia Lalanabaravi, Achal Kumar, Mohammed Shafeen, and Ranjani Devi.

Milestones Achieved: Dr Rohit Kumar, Wati Ledua, Jone Buatoka, Virisine Lalasava, Saleshni Shafeen, Jasveer Singh, and Adriano Tabualevu.

Job Excellence: Abishek Chand, Venaisi Tudrau, Reijieli Wiliame, Sainiana Kirisitiana, Dr Beato Lenoa, and Isei Namacamaca.

Another Special Award went to Acting Chief Economist, Ms Sera Bose for the EP&S Division Milestone Achievement.



Ministry staff during the Awards



Minister for Agriculture-Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy presents an award to Acting CE - Ms. Sera Bose



Awardees after receiving their awards



MOA Staff from north and west take time out for a selfie during the awards



Ms. Irene Chand receives her awards from the Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

PHOTO GALLERY



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy planting a tree to commemorate World Soil Day.



Nadroga Navosa staff during their Staff Awards



Nadroga Navosa Staff Awards cake cutting ceremony.



Ministry staff during the launch of Fiji Agriculture Statistics Online data library at Tanoa International Hotel.



New leased vehicles for Central Division.



Staff attending a 3 days workshop on Meteorological Services funded by UNDP in the Western Division.



SAO Tailvu and his team at Waibula Farm Rice Harvesting, Korovou, Tailvu.



LRPD staff after the 2 days meeting at Nadave.