



# AGRICULTURE *Newsletter*



Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment  
Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

The Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy announced 5 new initiatives that will be implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture.

The 5 new initiatives that the Ministry of Agriculture will be implementing soon will ensure that production is successfully influenced through demand side intervention.

These are optimizing the use of Juncao Grass to enhance livestock production, backyard gardening packages, establishment of fruit tree orchards, upscaling of pulse seed production and young farmers' business incubation scheme.

## 1. Optimizing the use of Juncao Grass to Enhance Livestock Production

In partnership with the Chinese Government's Juncao Technology Program, medium-large livestock farms will be chosen to plant 0.5 acres of Juncao grass, which farmers will later expand for livestock feed. For a single hectare of Juncao grass planted, a total of 450 tonnes of green feed can be produced and prepared as silage feed for livestock during drier periods of the year.

The Agriculture Ministry will provide a limited number of air tight bags for storage of shredded forage to be used during droughts. Juncao grass can be supplied as green forage for livestock

## MINISTRY ANNOUNCES FIVE NEW INITIATIVES

and highly appropriate for Fiji's Northern and Western divisions, where it can withstand annual dry spells. The project implementation will be equally distributed amongst locations with commodity specific to dairy, beef and small ruminant farms.

### 2. Backyard Gardening Packages

To spur backyard gardening in urban and peri-urban areas for food security and nutritional improvement, the ministry will pilot the distribution of backyard gardening packages. Each package is worth \$65 and will include a guide for gardeners, up to 25 potting bags, up to five bags of garden soil and seeds and seedlings for four crops and two fruit trees. Packages will be provided to potential urban gardens in each town on Saturdays, beginning with Tavua and Ba. Interested recipients will have to complete Gardener Profile Forms for monitoring and evaluation of their gardens.

### 3. Establishment of Fruit Tree Orchards

The Ministry aims to establish 40 orchards annually for the next three years, in demarcated areas for mangos, avocados, guavas, dragon fruit, breadfruit, citrus, passionfruit and Tahitian chestnuts. Twenty farms are targeted for the 2018/2019 financial year, with the ministry to select farms ranging from one to three acres. Following appropriate soil and agronomic tests, the Ministry will clear up selected farms, prepare field for planting and assist in planting.

This initiative aims to increase established fruit orchards aside from seasonal fruit, reduce the import bill of fruit, improve farmer's livelihoods and the health of Fiji's general population and the supply of local fruit. Interested farmers can register their interest with the Ministry.

### 4. Upscale Pulse Seed Production

The Ministry will partner with selected farmers who can allocate at least an acre of land to

plant a particular pulse at commercial scales. These dried edible seeds will be produced by the Ministry in accordance with existing revised Standard Operating Procedures. The Ministry will provide pulse seeds such as beans, urd, mung and pigeon pea to large farmers and undertake the first complete land preparation for planting pulse seeds, as well as supervise planting and linking buyers the farmers. Small farmers will continue to receive pulse seeds from extension offices. As a major source of protein, Fiji currently imports around 4,000 tonnes of different pulses at a value of about \$9 million dollars.

### 5. Young Farmers Business Incubation Scheme

The Ministry aims to engage 100 youths aged 20-30 years for intensive hands on training over a three-year incubation period, with a focus on youths with land readily available for agricultural purposes and who are already engaged in farming. These youth farmers will be required to target quality produce for local and export market and will be pegged with a buyer/exporter who will also provide requirements for quality and assist maintaining high-quality produce.

Young farmers will be guided towards farming as a business, and the initiative is also anticipated to address Fiji's increasingly aging farmers in rural communities. As a demand-driven project, a Steering committee will oversee crop planning, crop types and farming systems, with buyers and exports to also play important roles.

"In Fiji, majority of our farmers (about 80 percent) belong to the subsistence sector," Dr Reddy said.

"There is a need to elevate these farmers into semi-commercial and commercial level agriculture to enhance our efforts to increase agriculture production to meet growing demand from local and export markets."

While announcing the initiatives at the Legalega Research Station in Nadi, the Minister confirmed that the projects would be implemented concurrently with existing programs for the current financial year.



# MINISTRY RELEASES GENETICALLY IMPROVED F1 SHEEP CROSS BREED TO FARMERS



Recipients of the F1 Sheep Cross breed with Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy and the Ministry staff

Local sheep production is set to significantly improve following the release of the genetically improved F1 Sheep Cross Breed at the Ministry of Agriculture's Nawaicoba Quarantine Station in Nadi on February 6.

Speaking at the handing over of the F1 Sheep Cross Breed to sheep farmers in the Western Division, Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the release paved the way for improved sheep genetics and production at the farm level.

"The improvement in the genetic make-up will create impacts such as improved weight gain, reproductive efficiency, and better production performance. According to the breed evaluation studies at Nawaicoba Research Station, F1 Cross Breeds have an average birth weight of 3.5kg compared to 2.68kg in the Fiji Fantastic breed," said Dr. Reddy.

"They also have a better average body length and low mortality rate when compared to the Fiji Fantastic sheep and a better twinning percentage than Dorper Sheep breeds."

With 120 male breeders and 60 female breeders being released today for farmers in the Western Division, Minister Reddy highlighted that the F1 Sheep Cross Breed was a product of crossbreeding between Dorper and Fiji Fantastic Breeds and would significantly contribute to improved production.

"The introduction of these F1 breeds on farms will boost the genetic make-up of the existing population and contribute to improved performances of these animals on local farms.

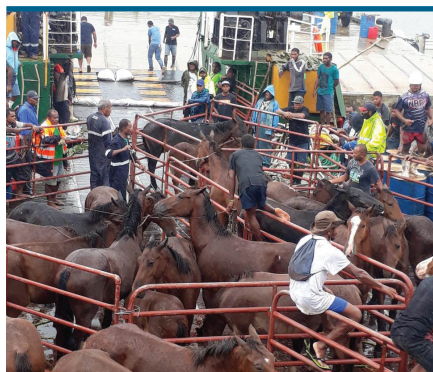
Hon. Reddy has also urged farmers to take advantage of this genetic improvement program to improve the current condition of their stocks. He added that the Ministry of Agriculture Research Stations would continue with its breeding program and evaluate the productive and reproductive parameters of various crossbreeds.

The release of the F1 Sheep Cross Breed is the culmination of decades of quarantine, monitoring, and natural breeding as a result of two way crossbreeding between various imported sheep breeds based on the compatibility features that could sustain performance in tropical conditions.

The crossbreeding program between Fiji Fantastic ewes and the imported Dorper Rams led to the breeding of these improved genetics, which has 50% features of Fiji Fantastic and 50% of Dorper Rams.



F1 sheep cross breed



The arrival of the 32 horses on Gau Island which was distributed to the 16 villages on the island

## GAU FARMERS RECEIVE 32 HORSES

The burden of transporting produce from farms on Gau Island has been made easier for farmers on the island.

This follows the ferrying of 32 horses across to Gau by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist farmers to transport their produce from their farms after harvesting.

The initiative, funded under the Agriculture Extension Services Program of the Ministry with

the total funding of \$32,000 is part of the Ministry of Agriculture's Rural Millionaire Concept for Gau Island.

Principal Agriculture Officer (Eastern) Epeli Dugucagi said the assistance would contribute significantly to the development of Gau farmers.

"This assistance will help with the way forward for Gau farmers and part of the Ministry's role is the development of farmers in rural and outer islands



thus the provision of this assistance.

"Some major commodities such as yaqona are produced by farmers from Gau and there are often problems they encounter as farmers in maritime islands, one of which is the transportation of farming produce," he said.

"The 32 horses for Gau include 16 stallions and 16 mares and were distributed in pairs, 1 male and 1 female to the 16 villagers on Gau to help ease the issue of transporting farmers' harvests," he added.

Mr. Dugucagi said the provision of these horses

was to raise farmers' income generation and improve their livelihoods; "The Ministry is working towards improving their production and farming systems and the transferring of horses is one of the avenues to address this."

"Since constructing farm access roads on the island was not a viable option at the moment due to the topography of the island, the horses will assist to ease the burden of carrying heavy loads from the farms to their respective villages," he said.

Farmers on the island were also informed about the proper handling of horses as it would be a shared responsibility amongst farmers.

"We also shared some very important tips on the welfare of the horses and our expectations on their safekeeping and usage because these horses are expected to multiply in number," he said.

Further training on proper horse handling will be facilitated for Gau farmers by the Ministry of Agriculture, from which an initial assessment on the animals' performance will be determined.

The farming assistance was received with much appreciation from farmers and villagers of Gau Island with a traditional ceremony of 'cere' being performed to welcome the 32 horses at Somosomo Village.

## KAVA PROCESSING SHED AND POUNDING MACHINE COMMISSIONED IN KADAVU



Kava farmers during the opening of the processing shed and pounding machine

The commitment of Kadavu Kava Farmers' Co-operative Limited (KKFCL) in developing the kava industry on the island received recognition and a boost following the commissioning of a Kava Processing Shed and pounding machine at Vunisea, Kadavu.

The facility, which will benefit kava farmers on the island was made possible through close collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture and KKFCL and is a milestone achievement as it is the first of its kind for Kadavu. While commissioning the project, Ministry of Agriculture's Director Crop Extension, Paula Tuione acknowledged the contributions made by Kadavu kava farmers in driving the development of the commodity despite their many challenges.

"This initiative is a symbol of progress and links the vision that the Kadavu Kava Farmers' Cooperative has towards the development of its

farmers. "Kadavu is well known for the cultivation of yaqona despite the hardships in geographical location and condition of the island, you still find solutions to combat this and this project ushers in a new dawn for the people of Kadavu and it depends on you to do your best to move Kadavu, and this partnership, forward," he added.

Mr. Tuione highlighted that the project was in line with the Ministry of Agriculture's vision towards a sustainable livelihood for Fiji stating; "The Ministry has viewed the sustainable development of the whole value chain, from the farmer to the market and we have looked into the improvement of farmhouses as well to raise the standard of yaqona pounding to another level," he said.

"It is encouraging to see the linkage of Kadavu Kava Farmers' Cooperative Limited's vision unfolding so farmers can witness and experience the returns and impact of Yaqona to farmers in

rural areas," said Mr. Tuione.

Members of KKFCL and kava farmers were also challenged to compete for the international market and to meet market demands.

"From what we have achieved and witnessed today, we can move further and proceed to another level of competition and it is your duty as yaqona farmers to step up to the challenge," he said.

The processing shed and pounding machine development assistance which was worth \$210,000.00 is part of the Rural and Outer Islands Program (ROI) under the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Kadavu Kava Farmers' Co-operative Limited was established in 2017 with the aim of assisting farmers to develop the commodity and to provide support to kava farmers.



# MINISTRY TO PRIORITIZE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMERCIAL FARMING



Senior Agriculture Officials, Stakeholders and staff during the Strategic Development Plan Workshop held at the Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi.

The contributions of Fiji's agriculture sector to the economy has gradually expanded through the years, with the sector set to experience further growth as more emphasis and focus is to be placed on commercial agriculture through the Ministry of Agriculture's 5-year Strategic Development Plan.

This was highlighted by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the Strategic Development Planning workshop in Nadi in January. "The Strategic Development Plan is a very important document that is to pave the way towards the sustainable development and expansion of Fiji's agriculture sector."

Minister Reddy elaborated the role agriculture played in people's livelihoods and that the drafting of a Strategic Development Plan would better place public sector resources for further expansion of the sector.

"For small nations like Fiji, agriculture has a more important role to play because agriculture is one sector which looks after all those people who are in the interior and maritime zone. It is therefore very important that we have a development plan which ensures that Government resources are given to the agriculture sector adequately, as this resource allocation is made entirely towards improving the livelihoods of the people living in the interior, rural and maritime divisions who often tend to be forgotten in the

mainstream development process.

"There needs to be a sector that creates surplus and the actual sector that can create surplus in a sustainable manner is the agriculture sector and it's also very important that we diversify our economic base because as a small island country, we're often subjected to shocks, internal and external, shocks that are within our control and shocks that are generated which are beyond our control," he added.

Minister Reddy also highlighted the need for the development planning process to look at building resilience due to the risks involved in the agriculture sector. "The agriculture sector is also not immune to shocks, the agriculture sector has its own unique shocks, shocks from pest and diseases and now changes from the climatic conditions have a major impact.

"The agriculture sector is one of the most vulnerable sectors as a result of climate change and it is in this regard that there are more priority objectives placed on strategic planning to ensure that the agriculture sector is able to build resilience to shocks arising from the increasing drastic climatic conditions. So to build resilience amongst societies, regions and countries, one way is to make our agriculture sector very strong, vibrant and diversified," he added.

Hon. Reddy also explained that the often

quoted notion of the sector's contribution to GDP declining over the years does not mean that the agriculture sector has not grown. There has been growth but not as significant as the other sectors.

"All the growth and development in the non-agriculture sector, if you analyze it at the micro-level and you find out where the surplus has been acquired from, most of it you will see has been carried on from the agriculture sector, but one of the peculiarities of Fiji's agriculture sector is the growth of Fiji's agriculture sector coming on the back of small and semi-subsistence agriculture for so long, and that has discouraged young able-bodied people from seeing agriculture as a future," added Hon. Reddy.

He reiterated that in order to drive the sector towards a more commercial basis, the need to capture the attention of young farmers was crucial, and for these farmers to view farming as a business.

"What we need to do now is to move into commercial agriculture, to get commercial thinking and also we need to convince our young able-bodied people that agriculture can also be a business. The returns from agriculture can be much higher than returns in the formal employment sector and it is," he said.

"That is something that we need to do, we need to market agriculture as a viable source of income," said Hon. Reddy.

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