



Agriculture NEWSLETTER



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CASH FOR CULTIVATION INITIATIVE LAUNCHED



Farmers nationwide are earmarked to receive financial assistance to help them “build back better” in the coming months.

This after a Declaration of Intent was signed on 18 February 2021 between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to facilitate the implementation of the ‘Cash for Cultivation’ initiative.

The objective of this initiative, is to provide cash assistance to vulnerable farmers affected by TC Yasa/Ana for the purposes of land clearance, land preparation and planting material to re-establish a 1-acre plot.

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said this initiative was being implemented to ensure the agriculture sector was rehabilitated as soon as possible.

“The Ministry of Agriculture, with funding support from development partners, in particular, ADRA, intend to allocate \$200 per farmer to cover the costs of land clearance, preparation and planting of a 1-acre plot of land.

ADRA Country Director Mr. Iliapi Tuwai expressed his thanks to the Ministry of Agriculture for partnering with ADRA stating; “it’s an honor for us to once again partner with the Ministry to launch this exciting project which we have been discussing for quite some time and now it is time to roll it out so that the farmers who are here and around Fiji will be supported by some of the money that we have collected so that it can be useful to you farmers.”

Through the ‘Cash for Cultivation’ initiative, farmers will be eligible to receive payment which will be made in two tranches, with \$75 as an up-front payment, and \$125 on providing evidence of land clearance, preparation and cultivation.

As with such development cooperation programmes, there will be extensive monitoring to ensure the second tranche is used for its intended purpose.

All farmers will be eligible to participate in this program and each household must identify agriculture as its main source of livelihood.

Cash for Cultivation will prioritize vulnerable households such as female headed households and families with disabilities.

Eligible farmers will be registered using an electronic form, advice on the terms and conditions for the cash transfer and issued with the first tranche of \$75.

The Ministry of Agriculture Extension officers and development partner representatives, such as ADRA staff in partnership with community leaders will ensure smooth implementation of this process. Farmers will be required to sign an undertaking that they will ensure cultivation and production.

The team will revisit communities to verify that the cash was used for its intended purpose and recommend for payment of second tranche. Further monitoring will be conducted by MoA and ADRA to measure the impact of the programme.

ADRA, through funding from New Zealand and European Union can initially reach over 1,000 farming households and contribute to more than 1,000 acres of cleared, prepared and planted land.

The program will focus on TC Yasa/Ana affected communities in the Northern, Central and Western Divisions. MoA will continue to seek additional funding and implementing partners to scale up the programme to reach more affected farmers.

The crops eligible for this program are any vegetables and root crops.

Agriculture Officials Serving with Passion



Dr. Anand Deo (2nd from right) and Dr. Beato Lenoa (3rd from right) with the livestock team at Batiri Research Station during the mobile veterinary clinics provided by the Ministry of Agriculture following TC Yasa.

They never thought twice except knowing that it was the right thing to do to help their fellow Fijians who were the unfortunate victims of Tropical Cyclone Yasa that devastated the Northern and Eastern Divisions of the country in December last year.

However, it is important to contextualize this situation; this deployment occurred a week or so before Christmas and continued through till the end of the first week of January.

At a time when Fijians, who were not affected by TC Yasa were preparing to celebrate the festivities of Christmas 2020 and the 2021 New Year, 41 officers of the Ministry of Agriculture volunteered their time in both the Northern and Eastern Divisions almost immediately after the disaster to conduct damage assessments.

These hard working men and women left behind the comforts and warmth of their homes to join others just as industrious civil servants to go out and assist their fellow countrymen whose homes and livelihoods were destroyed.

The experience has left its mark on these officers who have since returned to their

respective stations with an overwhelming outpouring of love for their fellow Fijians. The officers also distributed planting materials, provided mobile veterinary services, cleared farms and debris as part of the Ministry's immediate food security rehabilitation programme.

Field Officer Viliame Naiorosui said the experience was one that would forever be etched in his memory.

"As a field officer what we witnessed was heart-breaking because on previous visits there, we were used to seeing livestock roaming on farms and ranches and crops flourishing, now only to be greeted with livestock fatality and crop devastation added to their destroyed assets," he said.

"When we arrived, there were other organizations and government bodies present for assistance and we reached out to our farmers nearby and in-land," Viliame said.

Opetaiia Tukai said it was an honor to provide assistance to those in need at that crucial moment as well as after each day's program.

"It was the company of the team that

kept our minds occupied," he said.

"In a place where devastation was at its peak with no electricity and water, what kept us going was enjoying the company of the staff around the traditional beverage."

"As the team was made of men it was understandable that most of the meals would always turn out to be soup, be it curry soup or stew soup. But we had forged a bond and it tightened with other field officers from other geographical locations who were also part of the team," he said.

Josaia Vucoka a technical officer who experienced his first Christmas away from home said the sound of the melodious voices of the choir made up of his fellow colleagues kept the Christmas spirit alive and brought tears to the eyes after witnessing the unfortunate circumstance around them who could not enjoy Christmas. In addition, not being with their loved ones during Christmas added to the nostalgia.

"Given that most of those affected in the North were farmers, it really was heart wrenching to see their source of income destroyed," Josaia said.

Ba Agriculture Technical Officer Isei Namacamaca said it was a sad sight to see dead livestock lying on the ground. To add to the experience, because there was no water and electricity, Isei said they had to bathe in drains for the first two days on arrival to begin their deployment.

"Added to that, my whole experience of TC Winston while I was in Koro kept flashing before my eyes making me emotional, as I knew exactly how those who were affected by TC Yasa felt," Isei said.

The devastation of Tropical Cyclone Yasa lead 41 technical officers from the Ministry to make sacrifices leaving their families behind for the patriotic feeling, giving up their comfort zones to help families up in the Northern Division.

The Vanua Levu-deployed officers had the likes of Savenaca Tuivaga, Jone Maka, Viliame Naiorosui, Opetaiia Tukai, Mohammed Kadir Khan, Ananaisa Soro, Ilaisa Nayasi, Josaia Vucoka, Selestino Balecikobia, Jotame Naureure, Peni Matea, Josefa Waqanidrola, Isei Nabitu, Akuila Tuvakaikoya, Jiaoti Batibasila, Tanarusa Naveata, Samuela Musuvanua, Yogesh Maharaj, Tevita Coanikeli, Ratu Inoke Lewanavanua, Dr Anand Deo, Sant Prasad, Vereimi Mudu, Dr Beato Lenoa, Moreen Lata, Sandeep Sharma, Ranjesh Chand, Aklesh Prasad, Ben Chand, Asween Kumar, Ravneil Prasad, Jeke Mouga, Avinesh Dayal, Sanjeev Kumar, Karishma Goundar, Roneel Prasad, Mohammed Shafeen, Shalesh Chandra, Virendra Chand, Meli Veikemuni and Jasveer Singh.

Out in the far flung Lau and Yasawa group of Islands, and across the Bligh waters to the Lomaiviti group, another 21 officers celebrated with the accommodating villagers of the outer islands who served them with the warmth of the season.



Improved genetic stock (breeding bucks) released



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, PS Agriculture-Mr. Ritesh Dass and Head of Agriculture Operations - Mr. Vinesh Kumar during the Release of Improved Genetic Stock at the Sigatoka Research Station.

Improving the genetic makeup of livestock in the country remains a priority for the Ministry of Agriculture in order to help ease the import bill of meat products.

This was reiterated by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy when officiating at the release of Improved Genetic Stock (Breeding Bucks) at the Ministry's Sigatoka Research Station on 24 February 2021.

Hon. Reddy said the release of the breeder bucks was a milestone achievement for the local livestock sector as it was an integral component towards improving the genetic material of the stock available amongst local livestock farms.

A common occurrence and issue brought up by livestock farmers around the country was the decreasing size of animals that was reared by farmers, with Minister Reddy highlighting that this issue of decreasing animal size would be addressed by introducing improved genetics.

"The issue of decreasing livestock sizes, be it in poultry, small ruminants etc and their shrinking size is primarily because there is a lot of in-breeding occurring, we are not providing new genetic material and farmers are not able to, for different reasons, bring in new genetic material, new breeders and therefore there is a lot of in-breeding and due to this continued in-breeding among our livestock, this is what is to be expected."

"Today is the beginning of a new era, whereby the Ministry of Agriculture will assist

farmers acquire new breeding material, new genetic material so that they can maintain the genetic material of that particular breed," said Hon. Reddy.

He said at the moment, 190,000 tonnes of goat meat was produced locally, with Fiji importing approximately \$1million worth of goat meat to meet the local demand, something he shared could be greatly reduced if local goat farmers maximised the strategic advantages available here such as favorable weather patterns and good pastures.

"What this basically means is that we don't need to import that \$1million worth of goat meat, but the other thing to keep in mind is that if goat meat is also consumed widely, then goat meat could be a substitute for other meats that we are importing, for example lamb meat, as almost 99 per cent of lamb meat is imported, as it's very widely consumed as well, second only to poultry, so that's the target, that's the vision we have, to substitute as much as possible the meat that are being imported in large quantities such as lamb meat, and if we do that, we will be saving a substantial amount of Fiji's foreign currency because we are importing almost all of our lamb meat," he said.

He reiterated that to do so, it was imperative that small scale farmers transition towards commercial farming and that the correct breeds were put in farms to improve the genetic make up of the stock in livestock farms, and through Governments support, all farms would receive fencing material

to develop their pastures, which would be provided gradually as this was the basic prerequisites towards such transitions.

Thirty-one F1 cross goat breeds were released yesterday to identified livestock farmers at a discounted price to help them develop their respective goat farms.

"Of course the farmers will have to pay, they will pay 20% less than the market rate, the live weight market rate is anywhere between \$10-\$14 live weight, so we'll take the base weight price, which is \$10 per kg, and we will reduce it by 20%, that's the methodology we have so we are giving it out at \$8.00 per kg for live weight and this is what farmers will pay.

"We cannot give it out for free because we want you to value these bucks, we've noticed that in the past, such assistance when given out free wound up being misused, and used for other purposes other than its intended purpose because we want you to take ownership of it and we're doing this to support the farmers by giving these breeders to you at a discounted base price," said Hon. Reddy.

Meanwhile, Uciwai goat farmer Mr. Waisea Saqasaya said the release of the breeder bucks was a relief for him as it would help to improve his stock size.

"My goats are the usual breeds that are available in Fiji, it's usually termed as jungle because the size of my goats are very small, I am very grateful to the Ministry for considering me to be a part of this release of the breeder bucks, I am looking forward to growing my stock and seeing a big difference in my production levels," said Mr. Saqasaya.

Echoing Mr. Saqasaya's sentiments was Korovuto, Nadi goat farmer Mrs. Litiana Rakavidi Ali who had plans to develop her goat farm and produce goat milk on a commercial scale.

"My husband and I are fortunate to be a part of this initiative, as I want to rear more goats because I have major plans to be a consistent supplier of goat milk for the market, there is a huge market for goat milk and this breeder buck assistance will surely go a long way towards me realising my goal," said Mrs. Ali.

Additionally, the release of these genetically improved bucks will assist in improving the blood line of existing ones on the farm thus improving the production and productivity of farms.

The F1 Breed, which is a cross between Boer and Anglo Nubian breeds was released to the farmers, and after one year of mating, other identified farms will receive these breeds as an exchange programme will be implemented to counter the issue of in-breeding by transporting the pure breeders to another farm to improve the genetic material at those other farms, otherwise, the exercise of releasing these improved genetic stock via these breeder bucks would be a futile exercise.

#iPlanted50 Fruit Tree Initiative Applauded



Mr. Aniti Vasa plants a coconut tree during the #iPlanted50 initiative at Vagadra Village.

The #iPlanted50 initiative which is a continuation of the same programme rolled out during Fiji's 50th Independence celebrations last year has been commended by the receiving communities.

The programme, which was upscaled from the 'Village Nutrition Security Initiative', entails the planting of 50 fruit trees at 50 select villages around the country as part of the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts to ensure the nutritional security of Fijian villages.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy spearheaded the programme implementation at Vagadra Village in Nadroga with the simultaneous planting of fruit trees being held at selected villages from all the four geographical divisions with villagers applauding Government's continued input in

their daily livelihoods.

Vagadra village elder, Mr. Aniti Vasa, 78, said the fruit tree initiative was a welcome one for their village as there was an increase in the village population.

"This is a very good programme because there are more households in the village and our future generations will benefit from the fruits that these trees will produce," he said.

"The only source of income for the village is turmeric, cassava, kumala and our livestock and with these fruit trees, we can look forward to healthier food choices and the onus is on our youth to maintain them," added Mr. Vasa.

Fellow Vagadra villager Mr. Mesulame Kunavula said there was a need for more fruit trees in the village as there were only a handful of trees growing within the village boundary.

"We are happy to have been chosen to be part of the programme because we now can source fruits without having to go far to get them, especially avocado, this is a fruit most of us here in the village like to eat," said Mr. Kunavula.

Minister Reddy said that though rural and maritime communities had a steady source of staple foods like dalo, cassava and yams, there was always a shortage of nutritional foods available to them.

"We've noted that there is an issue with balanced nutrition in our communities, often in our interior and maritime areas, people do not enjoy a balanced and nutritional diet," said Minister Reddy.

"You may not experience the lack of a balanced diet now but over time, you may see the impacts of a lack of nutrition in your lives.

He shared the long-term vision of the Ministry to improve the quality of life of current and future generations stating; "at the Ministry of Agriculture, we decided that something must be done to ensure regular access to nutritional produce, particularly fruits."

Minister Reddy also requested all the assisted villages to be collective caretakers of the fruit trees that were planted in their villages.

Additionally, home gardening packages were also distributed to households to further enhance their food and nutritional security and complement traditional food sources.

Fruit trees ranging from mangoes, avocado, green pearl guava variety, home gardening packages, pomegranate, coconut and breadfruit seedlings were planted as part of the programme.

UK Government hands over nursery kits to COVID-19 impacted workers in tourism belt



(Middle with Tie) British High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency George Edgar, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and recipients of the nursery kit and MoA Officials during the handing over.

The British Government handed over 54 nursery kits to the Fijian Government on Thursday (7.01.21) to assist those who had been economically impacted by COVID-19 to turn to agriculture as an alternative livelihood option.

At the handover ceremony in Sigatoka and Nadi, British High Commissioner to Fiji, His Excellency George Edgar said the event was a result of close collaboration between the British High Commission and the Ministry of Agriculture through its Food Security and Accelerated Agriculture Growth Plan.

"...which is aimed at rebuilding and accelerating agriculture in response to COVID-19 and the recent tropical cyclones that have done such damage to Fiji, including to its agriculture," he said.

"In October 2020, the UK Government

through its International Program provided funding assistance up to \$FJD53,860 to the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen the resilience of Government's crop nurseries."

His Excellency said it was part of a broader effort to support resilience in the face of negative social economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In receiving the nursery kits on behalf of Government, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy thanked His Excellency for the extensive assistance provided by the British Government to start up nurseries that would serve multiple roles.

"Households who had lost employment in the formal sector are now able to secure an alternative source of income.

"Not only will they be able to generate a source of income but they will also contribute to our second most important role in agriculture which is to expand the agriculture sector commercially," he said.

Another rippling effect, the Hon. Dr

Reddy explained, was that the nursery products these nursery owners would have in their care - other farmers would buy, thus expanding agriculture commercial activity.

Mrs Bina Bikashni Lal, 34yrs, of Barara Flats on Valley Road, Sigatoka was all-smiles when receiving her nursery kit.

"It's my first time to do farming. It's very hard for me, because sometimes it rains and sometimes it's too hot and I cannot work on the farm. Before I used to sit in the shade and work," she said.

She used to work in a Gift Shop in Sigatoka and her family also ran a DVD shop until COVID-19 impacted her work and business. She was forced to work on reduced hours until she eventually had to leave employment altogether.

She said her husband and son would help her set up her nursery. Mrs Lal will plant seedlings and flowers in her nursery.

"I feel very happy for this assistance. I have three kids and need to prepare them for school and this will help me.

"Thank you very much for supporting us at this hard time," she said of the assistance given by His Excellency George Edgar.

Another recipient, Mr Joeli Vatavehi, 59yrs, who received the nursery kit on behalf of the Nawamagi Village Group, said in itaukei, the assistance would motivate the group members to continuously plant non-stop as the nursery would protect the seedlings and plants from the elements.

He said his 15 group members were all farmers and used to supply their produce to the hotel until COVID-19 hit the tourism sector. He said they now were taking their produce to the Sigatoka Market to sell to make ends meet.

Mr. Vatavehi said the group were trialing out small greenhouses they had built in the village where they had cucumber and beans already nurtured there and the nursery kits they received would greatly boost the existing production.

He also thanked the British Government for the assistance, which he had waited so long for.

Ministry farewells two long serving staff and FAO consultant



Mr. Akuila Nacoke



Mr. Poasa Tuilevuka

The Ministry paid tribute to the services of two of its long serving officers after they retired from the civil service in February.

Principle Agriculture Officer Policy, Mr Akuila Nacoke and LRPD Clerical Officer, Mr. Poasa Tuilevuka were each hosted to fitting farewell ceremonies by their respective divisions - Economic Planning and Statistics and Agriculture Operations.

Mr. Tuilevuka had spent 35 years with the Ministry whilst Mr. Nacoke had spent a total of 28 years in the civil service.

As such the pair were afforded only the best send off, as befitting the years served to the Ministry and Government.

Mr. Tuilevuka was a man of very few words and only said 'Thank You' when given

the opportunity to speak at his farewell.

Mr. Nacoke, on the other hand, expressed his deep appreciation for those that attended his ceremony.

"I bid you farewell not only as a staff of the Ministry but also as a civil servant. I worked for two key Ministries - Agriculture and Education.

"I feel I don't deserve this farewell for two reasons; one, this is my way of giving back to the nation, to the communities - so I don't need a farewell; second, we are going through tough times due to COVID-19 and we all are trying to make ends meet at home, and organizing these functions I know is a burden on some of you, that's why I say I don't deserve this farewell.

"Despite that, I am amazed and honored and I thank the Acting Chief Economist for this at this magnitude," he said.

"Thank you for the contributions and effort. I pray that the good Lord will richly bless you."

FAO Consultant Mr. Phillippe Brewster was shocked when he was also presented with a garland and the surprise was clearly evident that he was completely caught unawares that the EP&S Division had also thought of him, as his term also came to an end.

He said last year was a difficult year for everyone with the impact of COVID-19 and the tropical cyclones that hit Fiji at the end of the year.

"Sometimes it was difficult being the Disaster guy. People would look at me and think all the natural disasters were my fault," he said.

"I came to the Ministry with very little expectations. I now know that you have incredible people here. Thank You.

"I am honored to sit next to Akuila, someone who has such knowledge and commitment to his work. I know I can go to Akuila for advice. Thank You Akuila for allowing me to sit next to you," he said.

Mr. Brewster also made special mention of SEPO, Titilia Davetanivalu and A/PEPO Stats, Sainiana Kirisitiana whom he closely worked with and had come to admire as well.

"Titilia deserves an apology, I used to dump everything on you almost from day one. It's my fault. PEPO Stats Sainiana, you know what you bringing to the table. You have a bright and incredible future," he said.

Dr. Anand: Never Be Afraid to Expand Your Horizon



Dr. Anand Kumar at the Batiri Research Station in Seaqaqa.

Decades ago, a young energetic farm boy from Nacula in Dreketi dreamt of becoming successful in life, and that humble vision made him, over time, unfold into one of the most sought-after personnel in Fiji.

Dr. Anand Kumar Deo is the Ministry of Agriculture's Principal Veterinary Officer and prior to his appointment had been providing his expertise in Australia as a Veterinarian.

He reminisced on all the memorable times he experienced in Fiji before migrating to the Land Down Under, sharing his drive to succeed was his primary motivation.

"If you want something in life, put your heart and mind into it, remember to pray about it, and have faith, you will get it," he said.

"Sacrificing is also the compass to success, for me personally, the road hasn't always been easy, or even straight, I had to make a lot of sacrifices for my family, my studies, and my social life to get to where I am today," said Dr. Anand.

His career began after he graduated with a Diploma in Tropical Agriculture specializing in livestock from the Fiji College of Agriculture.

"I worked with the Department of Information while waiting for a post with the Ministry of Agriculture and my first Agriculture work was in the Pig Section of the Ministry where I worked for two years,"

he said.

"Afterwards I was posted as a Locality Livestock Officer for Serua/Namosi based in Navua and it was there that I enjoyed every ounce of being a field officer, visiting places, and sometimes, I had to be the only officer around," said Dr. Anand.

The career-oriented man then grabbed the opportunity to broaden his horizons and to further his studies at Gatton College in Queensland, Australia to study Bachelor of Applied Science in Rural Technology.

Inspired by his former boss and lecturer at the Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA) Dr. Peter Saville, his passion for the Veterinarian profession was fulfilled when he decided to study an undergraduate program, namely the Bachelor in Veterinary Science at the University of Queensland in the following year.

"It was a rare profession back home and I one day decided to try and switch, I took a leap of faith and to this day, I have not regretted the decision I made years back," he said.

After graduating, Dr. Anand returned home and served as Veterinary Officer with the Ministry of Agriculture and was posted to the Western and Central Division before resigning and migrating to Australia to continue his passion.

While still with the Ministry of Agriculture,

he was also engaged at FCA as a part-time lecturer for livestock students.

His love for VET work led him to take up the reigns once more when he returned to Australia, picking up from where he left off in Fiji.

He is vastly experienced, having worked at various veterinary clinics, the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service, as Manager Food Safety/Animal Welfare, Area Technical Manager, an On-Plant Veterinary Officer based in all Australian States and Territories, and later as a Veterinary Officer in the Policy, Animal Biosecurity Branch of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, Canberra.

"My work as a Vet in Australia involved a lot of travelling and I enjoyed it, my last official trip I did in Australia before taking this post with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fiji was being a live animal export Veterinarian," he said.

"We travelled by ship to deliver live animals from Australia to China, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Middle-East."

"Now I am back in Fiji to work with the Ministry of Agriculture and I hope to come and instill and share my work experience with the officers for the betterment of the Animal Health and Production Division," he said.

"I left Fiji to study in Australia, returned to Fiji to work, and again went for greener pastures to Australia and now I am back in Fiji to once again serve," said Dr. Anand.

"I am not trying to boast about my qualification or where I have worked but merely trying to encourage and challenge you that anything is possible when you put your heart into it, you may stumble along the way but always remember to rise," he said.

"When others have faith in you, it truly gives you wings. I am grateful to all those in my profession and my wife and three daughters who have given me that strength and allowed me to reach heights I never expected."

"Invest in yourselves, when you come across training opportunities go for it, learn new things, develop your skills and passion and sacrifice for a better tomorrow," he said with a smile.

At the height of the recent TC Yasa, Dr. Anand was part of the deployed officers from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Northern Division for Rehabilitation work.

"It was a good feeling to be able to serve and assist the community you grew up in, offering your service for the betterment of livestock farmers in affected places and placing smiles on their faces while tending to their livestock is heart-warming."

"I became a Vet to get my hands dirty, added to my love for animals, and to advocate my passion to treat animals the same way you would treat your children," he said.

Despised agriculture studies takes over first love of nursing



Marie Firomena Kaitu'u on routine check as Meat Inspector at the Fiji Meats Industry Board slaughterhouse in Nakasi.

Leaving the comforts of her island home, the love of her parents, and the familiar company of friends and families, Marie Firomena Kaitu'u travelled 401 miles from Rotuma to Fiji to undertake tertiary education.

Originally from Noa'tau in Rotuma with maternal links to Juju, the then teen-aged Marie had her sights set on joining the nursing profession.

"My dream job was to become a nurse but after completing my secondary education, unfortunately, the nursing 2005 intake was put on hold. Instead, I was advised by our Careers teacher to try other fields," she said.

However her family encouraged her to apply for a scholarship as it was the dream of students on the island to come to Fiji for their tertiary studies.

"Agriculture studies was never my option to study because farming was what we did on the island for survival but because the nursing intake was closed I had no other option but to just choose Agriculture," Marie said.

Marie applied for the former Public Service Commission scholarship while she continued to help her parents on the island.

"Names of successful scholarship recipients appeared in the newspapers and because paper deliveries on the island depends on the arrival of ships and planes, we were unaware of the selected names," said Marie.

"Later one weekend we received a call from one of my uncles in Suva who informed my parents that my name was in the newspaper," recalled Marie.

Marie vividly remembered how she despised the news as her heart was still with nursing. Only due to the financial burden

on her parents if she continued to pursue her desires that she reluctantly accepted the scholarship to study Diploma in Tropical Agriculture.

"I left Rotuma to start a new path without my parents and family members and enrolled at the Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA) in Koronivia," she said.

"At Koronivia, I discovered that Agriculture had more branches and I was glad I found out that there is more to just planting and selling," she said.

Marie graduated from FCA in 2007 and was employed as a Farm Hand at the Dairy Farms Fiji Limited in Navua before joining the Ministry of Agriculture in 2010.

"It has always been said that when God closes one door he opens another one with bigger and greater things and we may have our plans but only His prevails," she said.

"I never made it to nursing school, I was disheartened but God showed me another path and this path allowed me to nurse animals," she said.

"Most of my working career was in Dairy, I also got to experience and visit places that while in Rotuma I never thought I would be visiting," she said.

"In the course of my work I had to travel the high seas to get to islands and trek through the forests to get to a particular village."

Marie was a Dairy Industry Support staff for two years before becoming a Temporary Livestock officer based in Navua. She took up the post of a Meat Inspector and moved up the livestock staff ladder becoming a Dairy Inspector before becoming an Agriculture Officer.

"I am mostly mistaken for a Fijian lady so I made an effort to learn the Fijian and the Hindi languages for field purposes."

"There were experienced people that coached me along the way and added to my newly acquired language. Also, while I was in Navua, we had to walk from Naitonitoni to the PA's office to fax our weekly updates to the Central office," she said with a laugh.

The trip she took to Fiji in 2005 was also the last time she saw her parents and her island home.

"The annual Rotuma Day roadshow of 2014 gave me the opportunity to return home and see my family and friends again, this time as a representative of the Animal Health and Production Division of the Ministry of Agriculture," she smiled with memory.

"I was approached by the former Director Tomasi Tunabuna and grabbed the opportunity"

Marie in her strive to equip and educate herself secured a 3 years NZ Aid scholarship at the Massey University studying Bachelor in Animal Science majoring in Animal Welfare.

"It is an exciting course and I look forward to finishing it but now because of COVID-19 we are released and will resume studies when we have the all-clear," she said.

The Meat inspector who is also the Agriculture Officer in charge of Sheep is now continuing her service to the Agriculture sector.

"Learn from experience people, don't always think you know everything even if you are highly qualified, always stay humble and broaden your mind to learn new things," was the message from Marie.

PHOTO GALLERY



Ministry farewells FAO Consultant - Mr. Phil Brewster and PAO Policy - Mr. Akula Nacoke at HQ Raiwaqa.



Ministry farewells long serving Clerical Officer - Mr. Poasa Tuilevuka at the Finance Office in Raiwaqa.



Ministry staff during the release of Improved Genetic Stock (Breeding Bucks) at the Sigatoka Research Station.



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and senior Ministry officials with members of Garden Creation Cluster.



Ministry of Agriculture Research team during the survey in Vanua Levu post TC Yasa.



PS Agriculture Ritesh Dass with the representative of Taipei Trade Office in Fiji, Ms. Jessica Lee and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture during the groundbreaking ceremony of the Agriculture Technology Centre in Vuci, Nausori



Economic Planning and Statistics 2nd Quarter Meeting held at the Ministry Headquarters in Raiwaqa.



Extension and AH&P staff distributing rehab materials to farmers in the North after TC Yasa.