

AGRICULTURE

March - April Issue 2020



Newsletter

MINISTRY LAUNCHES WEBSITE



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Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy launches new Official Website for the Ministry at the MoA Conference Room in Raiwaqa.

Providing efficient and effective services to clientele is crucial, and requires the involvement of critical thinkers to push the frontiers of any organization to better streamline business processes.

This was shared by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while launching the Ministry of Agriculture's revamped website on 03rd April 2020.

He elaborated on the need to continuously interrogate procedures to improve service delivery as the decision-making unit that existed internally could become dynamic.

"We need to continuously think about how we can improve and build on our website, taking into account contemporary issues in this society," said Hon. Reddy.


He said the launching will take into

account several features of clients and service providers as the Ministry would align to Government's vision, in terms of information to be included and content.

"Any Information Technology development should not exclude people, we need to ensure that it includes our client users, and we will make the best use of it in terms of quick information dissemination," added Hon. Reddy.

The new website incorporates a few new features, an interactive chat option, which will be available on a 24-hour basis whereby users can interact with the Ministry on any queries regarding the Ministry's service.

There is also now a more comprehensive media gallery and available resources on this new website to ease information accessibility for the Ministry's clients and stakeholders.



Overwhelming Response to Agriculture COVID-19 Assistance

MoA Officials at Cakobau House packing seeds during the COVID-19 response initiative.

There has been an overwhelming response from the general public regarding the Agriculture COVID-19 Response initiative spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Following the announcement made by the Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy on 18th March 2020, on the Ministry's upscaling of initiatives as a direct response in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, a total of 11,602 seed packages for Home Gardening were distributed across Fiji by the end of April.

Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the Ministry would continue to play an integral role during such times of national disasters.

"Since launching the Home Gardening package, we have distributed 4,774 packages in the Central Division, 979 in the Western Division, 4,782 in the Eastern and 150 in the Northern Division respectively, additionally, 917 seed packages were distributed to employees of various NGOs, entities, and organizations," he said.

"Cumulatively, this comprised of 129,024 individual packs of various commodity seeds that have been distributed to the general public," shared Minister Reddy.

The initiative will greatly enhance food

security by providing Fijians the following opportunities;

- Direct access to a diversity of nutritionally rich foods;
- Increased purchasing power from savings on food bills; and
- Fall-back food provision due to the potential decrease in production and trade caused by the TC Harold and COVID 19.
- Continuity and sustaining food supply through home gardening now and into the future.

Minister Reddy also mentioned that despite the distribution of such a large number of seed packages, there remained a large number of households who were interested in making full use of vacant land around their house to grow their food

Also, under the Farm Support package, which aims to boost the production of short-term crops by providing seeds and planting materials to farmers around Fiji, a total of 689 packages had been distributed to farmers in the four divisions. Of this, 165 packages were distributed in the Central Division, 220 in the West, 209 in the Northern Division, and 92 in the Eastern Division respectively by April.

"Whilst most farmers have been vastly hampered by adverse weather we have experienced recently, this initiative will ramp up now as we focus on our recovery efforts across all affected areas," said Minister Reddy.

The Ministry of Agriculture will continue to fully support and assist our farmers to help them recuperate from TC Harold, as well as to further improve food security.

Under the Farms Support initiative, farmers selected the seed or planting material which they required from the targeted crops; Taro, Cassava, Rice, Kumala, Duruka, Eggplant, Chillies, Okra, Tomatoes, Maize, Bitter gourd, Pigeon pea, Cowpea, and Squash.



"A sustainable, competitive and resilient agriculture sector"



Corporate Profile

HEAD OF AGRICULTURE OPERATIONS & DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Former Principal Agriculture Officer West Vinesh Kumar has been appointed as the Head of Agriculture Operations & Development Services, reporting to the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, effective from 10th February 2020.

This role will provide executive leadership and oversight of the operational functions as well as oversee the land resource planning and mechanization plans for the Ministry, together with the Animal Health and Production and Crop Extension divisions being under this portfolio as well.

Kumar brings a wealth of experience and knowledge with him.

He holds a Doctor of Philosophy degree from the University of South Pacific, with a Masters Degree in Policy Administration from the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, together with other accreditations from other institutions.

With his vast experience and knowledge, Kumar will help achieve the Ministry's vision to uplift and transform the sector.



*Vinesh Kumar
Head of Agriculture Operations & Development*

HEAD OF AGRICULTURE RESEARCH

Mr. Shalendra Prasad was appointed as the Head of Agriculture Research with effect from 10th February 2020.

Before this appointment Mr. Prasad was the Principal Research Officer – Horticulture at the Ministry's Sigatoka Research Station. He is a career researcher and has over 25 years of experience in agricultural research. He joined the Ministry in 1994 and has a strong dedication towards agriculture research and innovation.

Mr. Prasad also has had several publications in reputable journals and articles and as a member of the leadership

team, has a keen interest in developing Fiji's agriculture research capabilities and to lead the transformation of the agriculture sector.

He also has a Master of Science in Horticulture Degree from Maejo University in Thailand and has a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture from the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. He is currently the President for the Fiji Institute of Agricultural Science.

With his dedication and passion for agriculture research, Mr. Prasad joins the leadership team with a wealth of knowledge and experience to help transform the crop and livestock research in Fiji.



*Mr. Shalendra Prasad
Head of Agriculture Research*

HEAD OF FINANCE

To ensure good governance in the administration and deployment of finance, Mr. Ajay Kumar Singh has been appointed as Head of Finance, reporting to the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, effective from 17th September 2019.

This role provides finance, procurement, and administrative advice and support to ensure that operational commitments are met, and the financial and procurement activity of the Ministry is conducted with transparency and accountability in accordance with legislative and policy requirements.

Mr. Singh has vast experience from various business sectors. Before joining the

Ministry, he worked as the Chief Financial Officer at the Wakaya Group of Companies. He has also worked as an Accountant at Blue Lagoon Cruises, Regional Programme Accountant at World Wide Fund for Nature, Senior Accountant at Stevens Central Electric, Accountant at Lees Trading Company, and Manager & Business Consultant at Nishaant & Company.

Mr. Singh holds a Post Graduate Diploma in Professional Accounting, a Bachelor of Commerce Degree in Accounting and Economics and a Diploma in Accounting all from the University of the South Pacific and is a Chartered Accountant.



*Mr. Ajay Kumar Singh
Head of Finance*



Corporate Profile

HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT & SERVICES



Mr. Ben Chand
Head of Human Resources Development & Services

Mr. Ben Chand took up the role of Head of Human Resource Development & Services with effect from 10th March 2020.

The role manages all human resource management functions within the Ministry of Agriculture, promoting best practice to develop a workplace culture that supports and encourages high performance.

Mr. Chand brings with him a wealth of knowledge and experience. Before this appointment, Mr. Chand was the Manager of Human Resources at the Department of Immigration. He has also held other key positions in reputable organisations such as Manager Operation at the Save the Children Fiji, Manager People Dynamics – Vision Investments

Ltd, and Manager Business Development and Projects at the Fiji Television Ltd.

Mr. Chand holds a Master's in Business Administration Degree from the University of the South Pacific as well as Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration, Postgraduate Certificate in Business Administration, Bachelor of Arts in Management and Public Administration and a Diploma in Industrial Relations and Personnel Management along with several other qualifications from reputable international institutions.

With his extensive knowledge and experience, Mr. Chand will be instrumental in achieving the Ministry's vision to uplift and transform the sector and achieve its strategic goals.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE FOOD SECURITY & AGRICULTURE GROWTH AND EXPANSION STRATEGY

Commercial Agriculture Ventures	Ensuring Village Nutritional Security	Establishment of Nurseries and Orchards	National Rice Programme	Securing Market
<p>Secure land tenureship for investors in partnership with ITLTB</p> <p>Provide initial planting material at zero cost to investor for commercial farming to be returned within 3 years</p> <p>Construct, upgrade, or maintain farm roads and drainage at zero initial cost for large scale commercial farmers</p> <p>Organise and secure local and overseas market for commercial farmers</p> <p>Provide full technical support and advisory for large scale farmers, including supply of nutrient enhancing bacterium medium organic culture in substitute for inorganic fertiliser</p>	<p>Provide each village with a set of 3 by 12 fruit tree seedlings to bolster their nutritional requirements</p> <p>Provide full support to village by delivering the seedlings, overseeing planting and provision of required training on good husbandry practices</p> <p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Long Term Food Security</p> <p>To further strengthen food security, every single household to receive:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One Coconut seedling which has numerous health benefits when fully developed 2. One Drumstick seedling which is a highly nutritious superfood 3. One Breadfruit seedling which is rich in fibre 4. Two Tivoli cuttings (wild yam) which is an annual crop with natural regeneration ability and is recognised as a climate-resilient crop <p style="background-color: #003366; color: white; text-align: center; padding: 2px;">Securing Urban Household Food Security</p> <p>To ensure food security of urban households, we will provide assorted vegetable seeds to all urban households</p>	<p>Establish fruit tree orchards across the country, with commodities such as;</p> <div style="display: grid; grid-template-columns: 1fr 1fr; gap: 10px;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> Breadfruit</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Mango</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Banana</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Guava</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Dragon fruit</div> <div style="text-align: center;"> Avocado</div> </div> <p>Establish a strong, secure, sustainable and extensive seed bank with large nurseries in Fiji</p>	<p>Secure 24,000 acres of farming land to achieve 100% self sufficiency in rice</p> <p>Provide 30Kg of rice seeds to every sugarcane farmer to dedicate one acre plot to rice cultivation</p> <p>Provide 30Kg of rice seeds to every non-sugarcane farmer to dedicate one acre plot to rice cultivation</p> <p>Provide 30Kg of rice seeds to every village in Fiji for community-based rice farming</p> <p>Provide small portable rice mill for clusters to allow processing of rice for home consumption</p>	<p>Ensure market is provided for selected high valued crops by securing markets within and outside Fiji</p> <p>Introduce contractual farming for terms of 3 years with defined commodity, quantity, supply and farm price to be paid to the farmer</p> <p>Farmer will get interest free advance to support their farming activities, netted against final payment to farmer for produce</p> <p>Contract scheme application to current and new farmers, or anyone with access to land and passion for farming</p> <p>All contract farmers will be eligible to become FNPF members</p> <p>AMA will facilitate deductions in consultation with farmers and FNPF</p> <p>Ordinary farmers will become members of FNPF, a first for Fiji</p>

#RaceTo\$18n
#MoreLocalProduce
#MoreFarmers
#ImprovedFarmerLivelihood
#ImportSubstitution
#JobCreation
#FoodSecurity
#AgriExportPromotion
#AgriLedEconomicGrowth
#Strong&ResilientFiji

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"A sustainable, competitive and resilient agriculture sector"

SUPPLY CHAIN ACTORS URGED TO REVIEW COMMODITY MARKET PRICES



Farmers from Naitasiri unloading their crops to sell during the COVID-19 Lockdown at the Dilkusha checkpoint.

The Ministry of Agriculture urged all who are in the market supply chain to consider the impact of COVID-19 on all Fijian households and to refrain from unnecessarily marking up the prices of basic food items such as crops and vegetables.

During the COVID-19 lockdown period within the country's two major cities, Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy had urged producers, middlemen, and vendors to sell their items at a reasonable price to ensure a mutually beneficial trade effect within the supply chain as well as for consumers.

He stressed, that the Ministry of

Agriculture would continue to deploy its officers to local municipal markets and satellite markets to collate information on market prices and to negotiate should there be unnecessary price hiking.

"We are living in extraordinary times and these are trying times for all of us, to say the least, I am urging all who are in the supply and value chain to be considerate of their fellow Fijians during this time.

"We reiterate our commitment to ensuring access to acceptable food of nutritional value for all Fijians but we cannot do this alone, we need the support of our stakeholders, in particular our

producers, our middlemen and vendors to be on the same page," he said.

Minister Reddy elaborated that seeing as the Government did not regulate vegetable and crop prices in the market, the onus remained within the supply chain to consider the ramifications of marking up prices on their respective businesses.

"We have no control over the prices that are being charged to consumers, but we can only appeal to our vendors to maintain an equitable, reasonable price on their products whilst marketing and selling them," he said.

SECTOR STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE TO BE LEVERAGED



Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (5th from left) with farmers at Barara flats Sabeto, Nadi.

The strategic advantages within Fiji's agriculture sector need to be taken advantage of to ensure continued growth.

This was highlighted by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while launching the Cambridge Farm commercial agriculture venture in Barara Flats, Sabeto on 05th March 2020.

Due to the migration in the international markets, whereby land is being earmarked for development in non-agriculture sectors, and the opportunities available here in Fiji for major agricultural development, it was important to leverage these opportunities for positive growth.

"People are moving out, the young generation is moving out of agriculture and that provides an opportunity for Fiji to take advantage of that particular lacuna in the

international agriculture market by producing agriculture commodities and or processing and value-adding these commodities into products and sending it to these countries and thus boosting our reserves position."

"Fiji has a huge potential to take advantage of the declining primary production in some of our main partner countries by raising our production, value-adding, quality controlling, and exporting," he said.

Minister Reddy, in highlighting the strategic advantages such as being able to grow crops on a year-round basis due to our climatic conditions, the copious amounts of available water for agricultural production, which unlike in certain overseas countries was given on a quota basis for agricultural ventures, and our pristine environmental conditions reiterated that commercial agriculture was the way forward for the sector.

"We need to focus on commercial agriculture, in that commercial agriculture paradigm, we have been commissioning and launching and incentivizing investors to come in and take advantage of the strategic positions that we have in Fiji and make critical investments so that we can grow agriculture and treat it as a commercial venture.

Hon. Reddy also added that the key priority areas in the Ministry of Agriculture's 5-Year Strategic Development Plan are to mechanize, modernize and commercialize Fiji's agriculture sector as we leverage the sector to become Fiji's main economic sector.

Cambridge Farms is a commercial agriculture venture which will focus on large scale rice production, with plans to venture onto other commodities and products.

TO SOW AND REAP LAVENIA'S STORY

A man reaps what he sows.

This is the defining verse that has driven Lavenia Tagi to become the woman she is today.

The seeds for her passion for agriculture were sown when she was but a young lass, growing up in the province of Bua in Vanua Levu. Her father, Apenisa Malai Tagi helped to nurture this urge within her when he served as the Postmaster at the Namalata, Kubulau station in Bua.

As a young girl, she'd help her father tend their home garden, and her relationship with agriculture only grew in leaps and bounds.

"My father loved to plant and every seed he planted would grow, we were even under the impression that the land we lived on was not fertile and farming on it would be useless," she said.

The Tagi family however would not let this deter them from growing their food as they set off on preparing their back yard to plant vegetables. Much to the surprise of the locals, their vegetables would flourish.

"Villagers told my dad that nothing could be grown on that land, but we tried our hand at planting and we eventually harvested our vegetables, even supplying our vegetables to the villagers," she said.

"He used to motivate me to say that nothing was impossible with God, we only need to take the first step, the rest would be His, and this was proven by our plentiful harvest from our garden."

"For me practically, home gardening has always been a hobby and we even talked to the plants to motivate them to grow, we also prayed over our garden during our daily devotions," she smiled.

She reminisced her time as a youngster growing up in Kubulau, especially her time in school as they would walk through forest cover and past a cattle farm to reach their home; "I always had a sack with me, added to my school bag, and it was my responsibility after school to collect any dry cow dung along the way for our garden."

La, as she is affectionately called, would always look forward to the time spent on their home garden with her mother and two

brothers.

"At our backyard in Bua, we planted carrots, spring onions, cabbage, long bean, so we didn't have to take a 4-hour ride to the Savusavu market to get vegetables for our meals as we had it all grown in the garden."

From her home garden straight to the lecture room of the then Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA), La decided to broaden her knowledge in agriculture, enrolling at the college in 2006-2008, before furthering her studies at the University of the South Pacific's Alafua Campus in Samoa in 2011-2013 before joining the Ministry in 2015.

Her upbringing helped mould her into the capable professional agriculturalist that she is now, as she works for the Ministry of Agriculture as the Agriculture Assistant (Yasawa).

"My work involves assisting the Agriculture Technical Officer in making sure that all identified projects of the Ministry of Agriculture for Lautoka and Yasawa are implemented properly according to our budget," she said.

"So far there are 9 clusters that have been formed and clustering of farmers is making our work easier."

"I was interested in medicine right up until Form 7 when I came to understand agriculture and the career paths it offered, through FCA I was introduced to other commercial farmers who started small and this motivated me more," she said.

"It is a diverse and secure field compared to other fields whereby for example, if you were to struggle financially, the land is always there and you can apply the principles of agriculture that you learnt to help feed your family."

Work takes up most of her time but that does not prevent her from the passion she's held for farming, as she returns home to tend to her garden in the afternoon and weekends.

"Mindsets have changed for my husband and I, besides meeting our children, we always look forward to waking up early to a new day and getting back home in the afternoon just to check on and work in our garden," she said.

"More than 50% of our salary is for our

food, with our garden, at least we can save \$20 per week on vegetables and this can all go into our children's money box," she said.

"With your home garden and through best practice, there will always be food on the table, even without money, you can feed your family with fresh fruits and vegetables," she added.

"Always engage your family members in the garden as it is not only a healthy practice in terms of food and exercise but it might also change someone's mindset," she challenged.

"Keep planting your food and use your backyard well as you will not know how much food your backyard can provide for you and your family, you will also save money doing so."

With the harvest from their backyard, La is now certain that she is providing her family with a daily balanced diet; "With the pawpaw and banana from our garden, and a cup of blended milk, I make smoothies for my children and it will be drunk within 5 minutes, and I also substitute sweet potatoes for potato when making curry and stews."

She has practiced what she preaches at home and is more composed in her role; "As a technical officer, I now feel another level of confidence in advising farmers how to manage their farms and the best practices they can apply for improved results on their farms," she said.

"If you're thinking of securing a bigger farm, start with your backyard first. Practice, intercropping, mixed cropping, using aromatic plants, compost tea, as well as mixing your insecticides from Neem, chillie, garlic, etc. to minimize costs and maximize production for a larger area and also practice organic farming on your backyard."

"Spend time on your plots, clean it well, break the soil and remember to water the soil well before transplanting," she concluded.

Lavenia and her family have witnessed the positive elements of engaging in home gardening, having planted maize, Bongo chillies, Chinese cabbage, Lettuce, Bananas, Plantain, Kumala, Cassava, Pineapple, Lemongrass, Long bean, Yams, Eggplant (Pritam and Chahat varieties), Pawpaw and Moca (amaranthus).

PHOTO GALORE



Farmers in Cakaudrove receive fencing materials from MoA



Households in Baulevu receive day-old-chicks from MoA (chicks were donated by Pacific Feeds)



Farmers in Vunivau turn up in numbers to receive fencing materials from MoA.



Ministry launches home gardening package assistance for its COVID-19 response efforts.



Ministry farewells former PAO Central - Mrs. Tepola Seniloli



Ministry receives Kubota tractors from Indonesian Government.



Seed packing team at the Raiwaqa basement.



Senior officials donate food rations to staff affected by TC Harold.