

The Matavesi Farm



Losalini with her children harvesting pineapples from the farm

Securing a family's future is a driving force that often dictates the actions of the common working class man and woman.

This fact of life was a factor that motivated the establishment of the Matavesi Farm in Seaqqa, Vanua Levu as it gave birth to the farm's matriarch, Losalini Matavesi's decision to opt for farming rather than work in an office cubicle.

"Unexpected things can happen at our workplaces, it could come in the form of a dismissal or being told that you are being laid off and often, people are unprepared for these circumstances," she said.

"You could be giving your all and

performing your best at work but all of a sudden, you could be told that your services are no longer required, which is why I always advise that it is best we involve ourselves in other ventures as a back-up if these things do indeed happen and we shouldn't be taken by surprise when it does.

This thought led Losalini and her husband, Vulaqoro Matavesi to commit themselves to farming as they treaded into unfamiliar territory in 2018 and purchased a 47-acre piece of land at Lalakoro Settlement in Muanidevo.

The Matavesi family hit the ground running and began toiling their land by

planting yaqona and pineapple as their main crops; "The cost of living nowadays is high and we cannot really rely on our salaries to meet the demands of our children and our family anymore," said Losalini.

"We've planted yaqona as our long term crop and have focused on pineapple as our short term crop to subsidize during rainy days and for the development of our farm," she said.

The family have adjusted to life on a farm, and their usual days are spent with Losalini and her six children in their farming gear working busily on their pineapple farm with a game of carom to round off a day's work.

"This is our second lot of pineapple that we are harvesting now, our first harvest was in December last year and we earned a reasonable income from it, the money we earned from that harvest assisted in the full renovation of our farm house with a few extensions," she smiled.

"Apart from thinking of a backup source of income, farming has always been my passion because I knew my capabilities as a strong woman," she added.

A year after, the Matavesi farm is adorned with 1,200 Yaqona plants, 1,000 Dalo plants, 2 acres of Pineapple, and Ginger, 2 acres of Cassava, Vegetables as well as Sandalwood for the long term.

Completing their farm are livestock such as ducks, poultry birds, cows, pigs and goats.

The couple are both civil servants by profession, and the family make good

use their weekends on the farm with their children; "The weekends are our farm days, we do not employ anyone on the farm, everything we have achieved is from my husband, my children and family members," she said.

"When we started farming and coming on weekends, it was disturbing for my children but we taught them the way of farm life and its benefits on us and now they have adjusted really well," beamed Losalini.

"With passion, we experimented with our planting techniques with advice from Agricultural Officers and that is how we expanded.

Apart from the extension and full renovation of their farm house from the farm revenue, the family have other plans in place.

"The education and the welfare of my six children is a priority and we are planning to buy a house in Suva and not on loan and improve the water source to the farm as at the moment we are using a well and the river that runs beside the farm," she said.

"We are also planning to utilize the other vacant land on other cash crops to plant more yaqona and practice phase planting," said Mrs. Matavesi.

She teaches her children the beauty of family time and to appreciate what they reap from farming as through farming, they can, slowly but surely get what they want.

"There is shared responsibility around the farm house and on the farm, instead of

phones, computers and televisions, they are to feed the livestock, collect firewood and amuse themselves around the farm," she said.

The enthusiasm of farming is not only visible on the parents but on the children as well as harvest time is always looked forward to.

"This is the second harvest of pineapple, with the vegetables and other crops the harvest is taken to the Seaqqa market with my children who are always eager," she said of her market.

"There is nothing to be ashamed of, you want to live you ought to do what brings food and income to the table. Farming is not only for a certain group of people, it is for everyone as there are lots of positive outcomes for farming, from extra income to eating healthy and fresh," she proudly said.

"Having a big farm or the money earned from harvests is nothing to boast about but the idea behind having a farm and getting things done from farming is what matters," advised Losalini.

The family believes their spirituality and religious upbringing has greatly contributed to their success of late.

"We are faced with challenges, challenges that drive us to plant more and to keep moving with our motivation about the farm and its impacts to ensure this is also achieved and we overcome them with faith.

Growing Pineapple for Cash



A pineapple farm in Ba

Recommended varieties

- Smooth Cayenne (Smooth leaves with large juicy fruits)
- Ripley Queen (Thorny leaves with small crunchy fruits)

Seed Rate

- Slope land 37,037 stand/ha (Suckers, slips, crown)
- Flat land 48,000 plants/ha

Planting time

- Best time to plant is in the dry season (April to July) to prevent base rot.
- On flat lands use raised beds in wetter months.
- Phase planting is recommended for year round production with the application of growth regulators (forcing agents) such as Ethephon.

Planting Material

Use crown (tops), slips, aerial suckers and quartered plantlets from the nursery. Best

planting materials are suckers weighing 250 to 300g or 25 to 30cm high.

Spacing

Plant on double rows:

- Slope land - 1.2m between double rows (ridges), 0.6m between rows on the ridge and 0.3m between plants on the row.
- Contour planting with alley cropping is practiced on slope land to control soil erosion.
- Flat land - 1m between double rows (ridges), 0.4m between rows on the ridge and 0.3m between plants on the rows.

Land Preparation

- Two ploughings and two harrowings are recommended for good soil tilth.

Fertilizing

- Super phosphate - 250kg/

ha at planting.

- NPK (13:13:21) - 250kg/ ha at four months interval after planting.
- Urea - 110kg/ha at one month after planting.

Off-season Production

- Production close to main season and mini season apply forcing agent (eg. Ethephon) at 75ml with 1kg Urea and 250g Borax in 50 litres of water.
- Production during off season (farther from the natural season) apply forcing agent (eg. Ethephon) at 100ml with 1kg Urea and 250g Borax in 50 litres of water.
- Apply the solution in the centre of the plant at 50ml per plant. Application to be done after 3pm. Crop is harvested in 5 months after application of forcing agent.
- Repeat application if it rains after 3 hours. Soil analysis should be done

before fertilizer application.

Bifenthrin is 3 days and Diazinon is 14 days.

Weed Control

- Manual weeding or inter-row cultivation from 1 to 3 months after planting.
- Then use herbicides to control weeds. Use Diuron 80/90 at 100g/15litres of water before or after flowering.

Diseases and Pests

- Heart and Root rot - plant during the dry season with good field drainage. Spray fungicide Sundomil at 50g/15 litres of water.
- Base Rot - dip the planting material in fungicide before planting. Dithane M-45 at 22g/15 litres of water or apply Benomyl at 10g/15 litres of water (sold as Benlate).

Pest Control

Mealy Bug

- Dip crowns in Diazinon to get rid of mealy bugs before planting.
- Spray Suncloprid at 3.75 to 7.5ml/15 litres of water or Bifenthrin at 14 to 18ml/15 litres of water or Diazinon at 56ml/15 litres of water. Withholding period for Suncloprid is 10 days,

Harvest and Yield

Harvest the selected fruits at quarter of half ripe based on market preference.

- Plant crop - 60 tonnes/ha with average fruit weight of 1.0 to 1.5kg.
- First Ratoon - 30 to 40 tonnes/ha with average fruit weight of 1.0 to 1.5kg.
- Second Ratoon - 20 to 25 tonnes/ha with average fruit weight of 1.0 to 1.2kg.

Gross Margin

At the rate of \$0.60 per kg for local market

- Slope Land
 - Plant crop - \$30,000
 - First Ratoon - \$25,200
 - Second Ratoon - \$15,600
- Flat land
 - Plant crop - \$45,000
 - First ratoon - \$38,000
 - Second ratoon - \$31,000

Food Value

- Pineapple is a good source of Vitamin C and Vitamin B1 and also contains fibre.



Pineapple fruit ready for harvest



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