

Aggressive Intervention Geared towards Coconut Industry



Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy touring the stalls at the Coconut Day Celebrations in Taveuni

An aggressive 10-year intervention program will be implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture in its efforts to develop the coconut industry through strategically placed stratagems.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the recent National Coconut Day celebrations in Wairiki, Taveuni.

With continued commitment shown by the Fijian Government on the coconut industry through increased budgetary allocations, Hon. Reddy advised farmers, stakeholders and members of the public of Government's intent to realize the industry's full potential.

"The Ministry over the years has provided support through infrastructure development and the provision of technical advisory services to stakeholders," he said.

"Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, will focus to provide aggressive intervention in the coming 10 years through strategies," he added.

Hon. Reddy further elaborated the three strategies as being; Strategy 1: Increased Coconut Production, Farm Productivity, and Farmers Income, Strategy 2: Promote Value-Added Product Processing and Marketing and Strategy 3: Promote Capacity Building and Provide Institutional Support to Ensure Sustainability of Development Intervention.

Strategy 1 would involve a strengthened and coordinated aggressive

replanting campaign (1.5 million trees in the next 10 years with 150,000 trees planted per year), in order to address 50% of the current 40% senile trees. Continued emphasis placed more on Breeding/Research for superior varieties through the revival of the Gene bank at Mua Research Station, with hybridization starting this year at Mua Research Station.

Also as part of this strategy, improving farm productivity per unit area through promoting Coconut Base Farming System (Dalo, Yaqona, Livestock under Coconut) would be extensively promoted, with more efforts placed on Pest & Disease Control/Management with the aim to reduce the current 30% infestation to a more manageable level below the economic threshold.

Whereas strategy 2 would focus on the continuous provision of skills-training on Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) and other high-value by-products to Farmers/Entrepreneurs/Small Micro-Enterprises (SME's)

The third strategy would involve the strengthening of extension work on Coconuts through the recruitment of Commodity officers, which has seen the appointment of 1 officer already, strengthened awareness campaigns on Coconut, providing a conducive policy environment to encourage joint ventures, promote local and foreign investment and public-private partnership and the formation of the Coconut Industry Strategic Plan and Roadmap.

Agriculture Minister Praises Qila Farmer for Adapting Technology



Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Qila farmer Rahul Kumar

The Ministry of Agriculture will continue to promote the use of technology and farm mechanization to foster improved agricultural production on the island of Taveuni.

This was shared to Rahul Kumar of Qila in Taveuni by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during a recent tour of farms on the island.

Acknowledging Mr. Kumar's efforts in ensuring a consistent supply of water for his dalo farm through irrigation, Minister Reddy thanked him for his commitment towards the sector at a young age.

"I wish to thank you for taking the lead through the use of irrigation technology to help in your dalo farming and I want

to assure farmers that we are looking at how we can continue to steer and promote agricultural development in Fiji.

"As a young individual, this is a good example of moving into agriculture as a business, developing mechanization and motivating youths to participate in farming as a business through the use of mechanization," said Hon. Reddy.

Mr. Kumar received \$13,015.50 of irrigation material assistance through the Export Promotion Program under the Demand Driven Approach of the Ministry of Agriculture last year.

"The assistance has helped me grow from where I was before, to where I am now in terms of production and the use of mechanization has really lightened the load and burden for me," said Mr. Kumar.

"I am grateful to the Ministry of Agriculture for the assistance and introducing a much easier way for the irrigation of my farm which is good for the development of agriculture because it surely increases production and at a faster rate too," he added.

Mr. Kumar is the first dalo farmer to engage in mechanized irrigation systems on Taveuni, with his irrigation idea receiving commendation and support from the Ministry to boost production. Since receiving the assistance, Mr. Kumar's production has vastly improved and he harvests weekly, indicating the potential for further growth with his revenue increasing almost three-fold from \$15,000.00-\$40,000.00.

Minister Reddy meets with Agricultural Exporters



Minister Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with the Ministry staff, stakeholders and exporters at Sigatoka Research Station

Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during a recent meeting with exporters at the Nacocolevu Research Station in Sigatoka.

Agro-exporters were also reminded to practice good ethical standards when dealing with farmers while buying their produce for the export market.

"We don't want exporters to buy seed material from farmers so that they don't have any planting material left to produce for the next planting season. This will also allow exporters to have a consistent supply of produce for the export

market.

"Cooperate with the Ministry of Agriculture, and consider shifting towards incentivizing and getting farmers to respond to the demand for production and supply," he said.

Minister Reddy also shared the Government's intent for exporters to be allocated specific areas to service while directly linking them to farmers, in order to establish contracts between the two parties.

"We want exporters to facilitate the establishment of farmer trust accounts to assist in the farmer's growth and development from those proceeds," said Dr. Reddy.

In responding to issues raised by exporters, Minister Reddy highlighted the Ministry's objective to set mutually agreed prices to address price cutting in source markets, which would ultimately inspire exporters to generate maximum foreign agricultural returns to Fiji.

"Currently, Fiji's export earnings from agricultural products, minus sugar and fisheries, is just over \$200m and we can easily double this figure in four years with some fundamental changes with cooperation from exporters and other stakeholders such as Biosecurity Authority of Fiji.

During the meeting, exporters also formed an interim association called "Fiji Agro Exporters Association" which will address the needs of all exporters in Fiji.

Meanwhile, the Founder and Managing Director of Cacao Fiji Mr. Arif Khan was impressed with the Ministry's initiative on calling all exporters together to discuss the needs and issues in the export business as it was the first time for a meeting to be held between the Ministry of Agriculture and exporters.

Mr. Khan also welcomed the formation of the interim Fiji Agro Exporters Association and looks forward to working with other exporters in promoting Fiji's agricultural exports.

Agro-exporters have been urged to effectively contribute towards the development of the agriculture sector in order to leverage and ensure the growth of

agricultural exports.

This was the message delivered by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and

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