



# HOME GARDEN BLOOMS IN LABASA



Mamta Singh in her garden in Labasa

"The little space we have fed us and catered for our daily needs and we will continue to do it for as long as we live here."

These were the words of Mamta Singh of Lot 111 Nasekula Road in Labasa, who practices home gardening beautifying her yard with leafy vegetables.

Her little heaven was created after her husband Gyanendra Singh had to be home due to illness in 2007.

"We live in town and buying vegetables from the market is expensive, I have never regretted making use of the little space we have here at home," she said.

"Some beautify their compounds with flowers and they bloom and create inner peace at the different flowers they plant but I find serenity in these vegetables."

From her home garden springs cabbages, lettuce and spring onion and is cultivated all year round with the practice of crop rotation for soil balance.

"Over the years we found that these three are highly in demand and few people produce it here in Labasa so we decided to just focus on these three vegetables for sustainable source of farming," she said.

Assisting her on her home garden quest are her children Nikita and Nikhil Singh and the support of her husband.

"We all help each other in our home garden from raising the seedlings to transplanting and its well keeping," she said.

Mamta needs no introduction to farming as she grew up in a farming community bringing it along with her as her prized possession.

"I grew up on a farm and when I got married and took the reins from my husband and father-in-law I was no stranger."

In addition she juggles her housework and gardening well having everything set out accordingly.

"I wake up at around 6am and water the plants then its housework before I return to the garden when the sun is up," she said.

"The way I feel towards my garden is compared to when I nurture my children, I make sure they are given enough nutrients to grow and I love to watch them grow and sometimes saddened when it is harvested," she said.

From the initial practice of gardening for home consumption in 2002 the family grew and are also supplying to the local market.

"On average we would get \$50-\$100 per day on

cabbage and lettuce and spring onions depending on the orders we receive," said Mamta.

"That is enough to put food on our table, pay the bills, buy groceries and pay for my daughter Nikita's accommodation fee when she was still in Medical school," she said.

Mamta and her family supply their vegetables to the Labasa and Savusavu markets, resorts, The Copra Shed, Shop n Save Supermarket and the Lunchbox restaurant.

Their home gardening practice is not only a not to miss site along the Nasekula road but has also given them recognition in the Agriculture sector.

The family received the Best Backyard Garden award during the Northern Agriculture Show in 2011 and the National Agriculture show in 2012.

Interest in keeping their home garden moving not even the negativity of the pandemic COVID-19 could hold them back.

"Although the market is slightly affected but we are grateful that we are able to feed not only ourselves but the community too," she said.

A part of the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture as recipients of the COVID-19 backyard seedlings the family continued.

"We are thankful to the Ministry of Agriculture for the assistance and it has given us the initiatives to not only help our family but to spread our wings and also feed those that are greatly affected."

"Another highlight of our home garden journey is the launching of the Backyard Gardening initiative in the Northern Division by His Excellency the President, Major General (Ret'd) Jioji Konusi Konrote in October last year," she said.

"Those are gestures that actually motivate us to keep thriving and keep doing what we have always done and always remember anything that you do won't go unnoticed so keep doing what you love."

The Singh's backyard garden has been both an inspiration and a model farm to the neighbours and the passers-by.

"We would like to let everyone know that this practice of home gardening is for everyone living in urban and peri-urban areas with limited land," she said.

"You will have no regrets in practicing home gardening, it will provide food and income security and keep you healthy."

"For starters, this is not late for you, make use of any little piece of land available at your backyard, if you do not have it, there are other ways that you can follow, like containers and bottles, it all comes with initiative for your future and willingness to do home gardening."



Spring Onion and lettuce in Mamta's garden



Mamta's home garden with cabbage and lettuce

# AMA EXTENDS PROCESSING HOURS TO MEET MARKET DEMAND



AMA staff packing cassava



Staff of AMA cleaning dalo

The Agricultural Marketing Authority in an effort to meet the increasing demand for root crops and vegetables in local and overseas markets has extended its working hours for processing and packaging staff from 17 June.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA), Mr Alvin Sharma said the staff will work over two shifts from Monday to Saturday and will be able to process more products.

"The increase in processing hours will also lead to less wastage as we will be able to process the relevant produce at a faster rate," he added.

AMA is also processing products at the Savusavu Collection Centre which created employment for others.

Mr. Sharma said produce such as root crops brought from the respective areas in the Northern Division are processed and sent to the Nausori office for packaging and selling.

"AMA has also introduced qualitative and quantitative analysis processes to better measure the efficiency levels of the individual staff and the overall internal Departments. These processes will soon be extended to other Departments within the Fiji Agromarketing Authority," said Mr. Sharma.

AMA is Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) and the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) accredited and are looking for fresh markets for the local produce.

"We are also providing relevant trainings to our respective staffs to upgrade their skill in value adding. This will assist us in opening up new sales channels for our products," he said.

To award the hard-working staff, AMA has the incentives in place for staffs that perform beyond expectations.

