

Farmer praises the initiatives of the Ministry and AMA



From Left - Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy, Head of the Mataqali Naivorati Mr. Tomasi Nasuikau and Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass in Naivorati.

The Contractual Farming initiative of the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) and the Voluntary Membership Scheme of the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) gained immense success with more farmers including women farmers showing interest in growing with the company.

A 55-year-old former Accountant, Mr. Praveen Singh,

joined AMA as one of the twenty farmers that signed contract with the Naivorati farmer's cluster in Lomaivuna last month.

Praveen, who is originally from Ba, says that he was always thinking of opting to farming and coming from a farming background, he purchased a farm in Tailevu and now supplies; dalo, cassava, ginger, duruka, rourou,

pumpkin, watermelon and assorted vegetables to AMA.

"My interest in farming grew when I saw an article where the Chief Executive Officer of AMA, Mr. Alvin Sharma mentioned about contract farming, then I approached him personally to get more information," said Praveen.

He said that farmers going into contractual farming is also a way to move into large-scale commercial farming.

"Previously, farmers had land, but they were unsure of what to plant and with AMA, farmers are now aware of the market demand and can grow targeted crops," said Praveen.

He said market was one of the major problems for farmers especially when the produce is not sold and the middlemen tries to lower the prices at the last minute.

"After signing the contract with AMA, the farmers have confidence that the market is available and they can reap the benefit by planting the

crops required under the contract," said Praveen.

He added that land preparation was another problem for farmers because hiring a tractor would cost them more than \$100 per hour but with the subsidized rate of \$28 per hour offered by the Ministry of Agriculture will enable farmers to put the unutilised land into production.

"Contractual farming has created opportunities, with more people moving into agriculture, especially during this pandemic those without job have seen the potential in farming," said Praveen.

FNPF's Voluntary Membership Scheme.

Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture, AMA and FNPF signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in making farmers and cluster members, the members of the FNPF's Voluntary Membership Scheme to provide social security for them.

The fee required to open a new Voluntary Membership account is \$10 and the minimum monthly contribution payment is also \$10.

Farmers can use their FNPF funds for short, medium and long-term social security needs such as medical, education, and funeral for themselves, children, spouse, parents and siblings.

They can also access funds for natural disaster assistance, housing assistance and old age income security through the Funds retirement products.

Meanwhile, Praveen says that having an account with FNPF is an added benefit for farmers whereby they will have money in their account which will grow with interest and they can use it for their future needs.

He said it's a great initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture and AMA allowing farmers to get the same benefit as any other person working in the private or public sector.

Ra farmers received yaqona cuttings

Twenty-five yaqona farmers of Ra received 100 yaqona cuttings from the Ministry of Agriculture to assist them in kava production.

The Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while handing the yaqona cuttings to the farmers of Ra last week said the assistance was to be used to increase kava production, improve the livelihood of the farmers, the economy and trade.

Hon. Reddy reiterated the message by the Minister for Economy during the budget announcement that agriculture will be a very important sector in Fiji's growth and development.

"We need to work together and get the agriculture sector moving because no matter what happens, agriculture is our hope; business as usual and status quo is not an

option," said Hon. Reddy.

Hon. Reddy urged farmers to double their efforts and increase the output in the next financial year and that will be achieved by working with the farmers.

"I want to see agriculture exports - products and commodities both double in the next financial year and we can only do that, with you; that is why we will continue to work with you, support you, and give you technical advice so you can put your land to full use," said Hon. Reddy.

Farmers were also informed to utilize the vacant land and venture into other crops such as rice, duruka, dalo, cassava, bongo chilly and corn and Agricultural Marketing Authority will buy from them.

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf

of the Ra farmers, Mr. Senivalati Nasomea of Savulotu, Nakuilava, Ra thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for the technical support and

advisory including the supply of yaqona cutting.

"I am very thankful to Minister Hon. Reddy for his support for us

yaqona farmers, this is what we want and I believe this will benefit the farmers in the long run," said Mr. Nasomea.



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy, PS Agriculture Ritesh Dass and Senior staff with the farmers in Ra

Central farmers received dalo suckers



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, and Senior staff with the farmers in Lakena

The Ministry of Agriculture handed-over 17,000 tausala dalo suckers to twelve farmers and one cluster group to boost food and income security for the dalo farmers.

The Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while giving out the dalo suckers to the farmers of the Central Division last week said every Fijian household is earmarked to receive assistance through the form of long-term crops for food and nutrition security.

Hon. Reddy said

these initiatives are being executed progressively and by the end of this year every household will be provided with the planting materials of the basic long term crops as announced.

He also announced an initiative on incentivizing large commercial agricultural ventures to leverage the sector to meet export targets.

"We are working together with the Agricultural Marketing Authority and Food Processors Fiji Ltd on value-adding; the market will not be an issue. We will try to give you our best assistance, as we want to grow the market outside Fiji," said Hon. Reddy.

"We want agriculture to be the leading export sector in a few years' time, as long as we are treating agriculture as a business," said Hon. Reddy.

Speaking on behalf of the Central farmers, Mr. Mark Tamanisau of Naisaumua Village acknowledged the commitment shown by the Ministry of Agriculture.

"This is a blessing in disguise especially for me and my family as we both were working for the Fiji Airways. I was one of the flight attendants terminated due to COVID-19 pandemic, this has saved our money to start my farm," said Mr. Tamanisau.

"I was convinced that these initiatives would bring great opportunities for all of us being assisted and to meet the agreement we have signed today to return the dalo suckers after three years," said Mr. Tamanisau.