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MORE THAN 3,500 FARMERS TO BENEFIT FROM NEXT SEED DISTRIBUTION CYCLE



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with senior management during the announcement of the next phase of seed distribution.

Government intends to target 3,716 farmers in the next cycle of seed distribution which begun on Tuesday, 1 September 2020 till December, 2020.

The announcement was made by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

He said this seed distribution initiative was also to encourage farmers to allocate one acre of land or more, to growing produce to meet market

demand, subject to farmers agreeing to a condition.

"The Ministry of Agriculture will provide planting materials for one acre of land or more such as seeds, seedlings or cuttings at no cost to farmers.

"The only condition to farmers is that we ask that they return those materials back to us in three years' time," Dr. Reddy said.

The Minister said the reason the Ministry requested for the planting materials to be returned was to ensure that one; other Fijians could also benefit; and to allow the Ministry to build up its stock pile.

"We hope that farmers will take a keen interest in commercial agriculture ventures."

A range of seeds would be available for farmers to take advantage of. These included tomatoes, cauliflower, beans, water melons, eggplant, chillies, kumala, and maize.

In addition, the Hon. Minister said papaya seedlings would also be available, however, those who wanted these needed to order in advance.

"We encourage farmers to take advantage of this program so we can expand the base of the agriculture sector."

Dr. Reddy urged those who had missed out on the earlier seed distribution to make their way to their nearest Ministry of Agriculture Office on Tuesday (1.9.20) to collect their seed packages.

In addition, the Minister said there were seed packages help available too for those who had lost their jobs in the corporate sector.

"If you have employees who have lost their jobs and they want to undertake gardening on a slightly larger scale than what backyard gardeners would do, then we have a special package for them.

"These packages would have more quantity of seeds," he said.

He said companies or businesses would need to send their requests to the Ministry of Agriculture with information on the number of employees who had lost their jobs and the location of the office so delivery of these special seed packages would be made to their premises.

"We encourage the household sector to take interest in gardening so you can get a supply of fresh vegetables; able to secure the health and nutrition of your family, and also reduce your household expenses," Dr. Reddy said.

FARMERS URGED TO PRODUCE SUBSTITUTES FOR NUTRIENTS IN IMPORTED POULTRY FEED

In order to reduce the high import bill on feed costs associated with the agriculture industry, Government is urging farmers to meet that demand by growing the necessary commodities to substitute the necessary nutrient requirements in the feeds.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said there were many reasons why

Government was emphasizing the need to utilize the land more.

"We want to motivate you to make use of your land, grow so you can meet the huge demand we have locally, one aspect of which is growing to reduce our import bill.

"And an aspect of that import bill is related to poultry feed," he said.

Hon. Dr. Reddy was making the comments while handing over

a boat and engine to the Duavata Farmer's group in Navuniyasi Village, Matailobau, Naitasiri recently.

He said there was no reason why Fiji should be importing poultry feed when the country had the largest poultry industry in the Pacific region besides Australia and New Zealand.

He said protein was one of the key ingredients of poultry feed

such as soy or fish mill.

"We are now producing fish mill in small amounts. But it is not enough, we have to produce more.

"Poultry feed also contains energy nutrients, again these are imported. Again, we can always grow its substitute like corn or other things.

"If you grow these things, rest assured that there is definitely a market for it. Market is available

via Agro Marketing Authority (AMA) and our Fijian exporters in the private sector, of whom the latter has played a significant part in growing the economy," the Minister said.

He said a contract would be drawn up between AMA and farmers as well as between exporters and farmers to ensure all parties mutually benefitted.

MORE FARMERS IN LOMAIVUNA SIGN UP WITH AMA



Farmers in Lomaivuna Sector 6, Naitasiri pose with their contracts with Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Around 12 more farmers living in Lomaivuna, Naitasiri including a few in their early 20s recently inked their commitment to provide consistent supply of root crops to the Agro Marketing Authority (AMA).

The Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the new cluster formation would join the larger Lomaivuna Cluster that was earlier established to also provide supplies to AMA in an effort to expand the market and at the same time assist farmers in finding a market for their produce.

"The advantages of organizing a farming cluster are; farmers are like-minded, they grow

similar crops, they will target the market and we at the Ministry will train them on compost heap preparation, land preparation, crop cultivation, and pest management," the Minister said.

Dr. Reddy said Government was removing hurdles from farmers to ensure they fully concentrated on their land to achieve maximum output from it.

"What we are doing is bringing the market to you instead of you going to sell your root crops in Suva or Nausori markets. We do not want you to divert yourself away from your core business of farming," he said.

The contract with AMA would mean two things: one, farmers who sign up are committed to consistently supply a certain quantity of commodities; two, AMA would provide the transport to collect the produce from the farmer.

In return, AMA has committed to buy these commodities at a fixed

price; no matter how the market may perform, such as a reduction in price due to flooding of the market.

Mr. Mesulame Aisake Titifanua, is a farmer from Rotuma who has been farming in Lomaivuna Sector 6 for the last five years. He is also an advisor for a newly formed group of young farmers called 'Future Depends Now' (FDN).

"The young farmers in the group are still in their teens so it will impact them in the long run, in terms of self-motivation, and in terms of independence from their parents so they do things themselves.

"I believe that way that they will be good and successful farmers in the future," Mr. Titifanua said.

Cama Bulivou, a 21 year old young farmer of the FDN group explained in i-Taukei that he had been planting dalo, cassava and ginger and now with AMA he was contracted to provide one acre of dalo and one acre of cassava.



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