

## AMA'S RURAL AND MARITIME STRATEGY GROWING RURAL ECONOMY



From Left: CEO AMA - Mr. Alvin Singh, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass during the announcement of the AMA Rural and Maritime Strategy.

Fiji Agromarketing's Rural and Maritime Strategy is working wonders for the rural economy.

The announcement was made by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while launching the AMA's Rural and Maritime Strategy at Nausori on Friday (27.11.20).

He said AMA was mandated to buy its produce from farmers

in the rural, remote, and maritime regions.

"To better assist the farmers living in these regions and to ensure that a confirmed market is provided to them, the AMA introduced the Contract Farming initiative in early May 2020.

"The contract farming model provides a guaranteed market for a guaranteed unit price to the contracted farmers for

producing a target produce for the AMA," the Hon. Dr. Reddy said.

AMA's target produce is dalo, cassava, and duruka, he added.

Other remarkable strides AMA have made, the Minister explained included working with BSP and FDB to provide soft loans to its farmers and making the latter members of FNPF; working on other business

opportunities which would allow it to add more target produce to its list in the future; contracting farmers throughout Fiji such as the Tailevu region, Naitasiri, Kavanagasau/Nabitu, Serua, Nadarivatu, remote heartlands of Viti Levu, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Tavua, Nawairuku area in Rakiraki, Udu Point/Qaranivai area, Wainikoro, Seaqaqa, Bua, Savusavu, and Taveuni.

"I would like to thank the CEO, the AMA Board Members, the AMA Leadership team, and the AMA staff for the excellent effort they have put in to ensure that AMA had shown significant positive changes in its business, and reach, which will further improve the livelihoods of its farmers and suppliers and contribute significantly to Fiji's economic growth and development strategy," the Hon. Dr. Reddy said.

"This is an excellent effort by the AMA staff in just six months," the Minister said.

He said as part of its Maritime Regions Development Strategy, the AMA was now expanding its reach to maritime islands with visits already made to Taveuni, Kadavu, Batiki, and Koro.

"As I speak, the AMA is already buying produce from Taveuni, bongo chillies from a farm from Koro Island, and has completed a buying trip to

Kadavu just this week.

"AMA will soon be buying cassava from a farm in Gau Island too," he said.

In addition, he said, AMA was in advanced negotiations with the Ministry of Fisheries in providing a market for the fishermen living in the other maritime regions.

AMA was looking at developing a joint synergy with the Ministry of Fisheries, Hon. Dr. Reddy said, in buying fish from these islands and to provide an alternative livelihood opportunity to those villagers.

The Minister said the Rural and Maritime Strategy would actively engage the participation of the grassroots people, more specifically to farmers and primary industry actors.

"I believe AMA was currently on the right track in fully serving its mandated role and is now well on course to show sustainable and incremental growth in business."

He said this was a positive indication that would improve productivity in the long run and foster a healthy relationship that bode well for both parties, through loyalty and trust, as AMA became the preferred option as a secure market.

## NATIONAL ORGANIC POLICY TAKES SHAPE



Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay with the invited guests, facilitators, and participants at SPC Narere.

Strides have been made in the area of organic agriculture that will soon see a National Organic Policy come to realization.

The comment was made by the Assistant Minister for Agriculture, the Hon. Viam Pillay while officiating at the workshop for 'Policy Drivers for Public Private Partnership

in Pacific Organics: Improving Extension Policy through an Evidence - Based Approach' at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Narere Campus recently.

"Our traditional farming practices are very much in line with organic agriculture methods.

"Today many communities still have agriculture systems based on age old practices which ensure environmental integrity and do not use chemical inputs," he said.

However, he added, for these products to be exported to overseas markets as "organic" they must be certified.

Hence, the reason for conducting the workshop to ensure that such process was made known to all stakeholders.

In Fiji, the Assistant Minister said, organic agriculture was expanding with more than 28,000ha under Organic certification.

"The Ministry of Agriculture together with its partners and stakeholders are ensuring that more focus is directed to developing organic agriculture for farmers.

"Organic Agriculture provides important opportunities for farmers and processors to export to niche markets a number of high value, low volume crops thereby enhancing economic sustainability," he said.

The Hon. Viam Pillay said the Ministry of Agriculture in its work towards encouraging organic agriculture practices, through its Research Division, have continued to conduct Research on organic fertilizer.

"A compost site has been established at out Nadurulolou Research Station where formulation of different proportions of organic material such as Poultry manure, Bat manure, Saw Dust, and Green Waste have been tested to achieve suitable NPK levels.

"Outcome of this exercise will ensure the best replacement for chemical fertilisers and the Ministry hope to launch this initiative by April 2021," he revealed.

In June, 2020 the Ministry launched its bacterium media in Sigatoka, he said, to assist farmers with bacteria culture for organic fertilizer.

He said the liquid solution would be distributed to Agriculture stations throughout Fiji where farmers could easily access it to use on their farms.

"Each bottle of bacterium media will be issued with a brochure to assist farmers in setting up their compost," he said.