

\$28.9M DAMAGE TO AGRICULTURE SECTOR



Remains of a dairy farm affected by Tropical Cyclone Harold in Deepwater, Korovou

The damage sustained during Tropical Cyclone Harold to the agriculture sector alone stands at \$28.9million.

While delivering his Ministerial Statement in Parliament last week, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy revealed that Tropical Cyclone Harold had devastated the agriculture

sector.

He highlighted the Ministry of Agriculture's intervention through the provision of assistance to the affected farmers via the supply of agro-inputs.

As part of the instant national response, a total of 20,600 Kumala cuttings, 300 seed packs, and 5,000 cassava cuttings was delivered to

Kadavu on 28th April 2020; with an additional 10,000 Kumala cuttings, 200 seed packs, and 5,000 cassava cuttings delivered to Lau on 02nd May 2020.

The Yasawa Group of islands received 7,000 Kumala cuttings and 65 seed packages, 3,000 Kumala cuttings were distributed to Malolo,

while Vatulele received 4,000 Kumala cuttings and 200 eggplant seedlings. On the 26th of May 2020, a total of 5,000 Kumala cuttings and cassava cuttings was distributed again to the Lau Group.

As part of the livestock sub-sector rehabilitation effort, 4,032 day-old broiler chicks valued at \$10,080.00

were distributed to 243 farms in Serua, Tailevu, Rewa, and Naitasiri Provinces.

To secure root crops for future use and as a precautionary measure against predation by livestock, the Ministry distributed 15 coils of 3 feet X 50-meter goat fence wire valued at FJ\$1,500.00 to pig farmers in Lau and Kadavu.

Dr. Reddy said veterinary drugs and drenches worth of FJ\$1,148.40 were supplied to the islands of Lau and Kadavu provinces for the treatment and health maintenance of existing livestock.

The initiatives are part of a broader package of programs, initiatives, and reforms that are being undertaken to accelerate the growth of the agriculture sector.

"Our national vision for agriculture as set out in the 5-year Strategic Development Plan and the Government's 20 year National Development Plan aims to build a competitive, sustainable, and resilient agriculture sector."

AMA CONTINUES CONSULTATION WITH POTENTIAL FARMER CLUSTERS



AMA CEO, Mr Alvin Sharma (2nd from left) and Officials at a recent consultation with farmers.

The Contractual Farming initiative spearheaded by the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) is gaining momentum and garnering interest from farmers around the country.

This follows the positive feedback expressed by farmers to AMA executive management, led by its Chief Executive Officer Mr. Alvin Sharma, during recent consultative meetings held with farming clusters nationwide.

The executive management of the

AMA, together with officers from the Ministry of Agriculture, has held a series of consultations with potential farmer clusters and has identified those who can meet the criteria and requirements to partner with the AMA through the Contractual Farming program.

Farmers of Naitasiri, Tailevu, Sigatoka, Nadi, Lautoka, Ba, Rakiraki, Nadarivatu, Bua, Seagaqa, Dreketi and Labasa met with the delegation and

representatives of the two institutions and have been made aware of the benefits of this new initiative.

"Productive meetings have been held with landowners in Lomaivuna, Naitasiri, Waito in Tailevu, Natelei-ra Village in Tailevu, Kavanagasau and Nabitu in Sigatoka, Nadala in Nadarivatu, and Vatoa in Ba," said Mr. Sharma.

"Our Management team is also talking to farmers in Sabeto to see if more of the farmers there would be interested in signing up for our farmers' contracts," he added.

These farmers will collectively plant dalo, cassava, ginger, chillies, eggplant, duruka, and pawpaw for the AMA.

"AMA has already announced that we will commit to buying the production output of our contracted farmers for 3 years, in their localities.

During the consultations, farmers were also informed that as part of the AMA's attempts for transparent financial transactions, there would now be strict financial requirements to be met by all potential and current contracted farmers like opening a bank account as the AMA was promoting the use of digital services when conducting any financial transactions.

ESTABLISHMENT OF LARGE COMMERCIAL VENTURES

The Ministry of Agriculture aims to boost its agribusiness potential and actively promote agriculture-led economic growth in Fiji through the establishment of larger commercial ventures.

Fiji's strategic advantage lies in the primary sectors, with the potential of the agriculture sector being complemented by year-round favourable weather conditions, arable land and availability of water, having a significant impact on the overall output of the sector.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy in Parliament last week.

He said one of the key requirements was the provision of land for interested investors who were willing to develop commercial agriculture ventures in Fiji; "We have had several interests and are actively working with medium and large scale operators to secure land, and the required input to take this sector to a whole new level."

Hon. Reddy also highlighted the collaboration between the Ministry and the iTaukei Land Trust Board (iTTLTB) regarding the initiative.

The Ministry will provide all required inputs such as planting material, farm preparation, and farm road upgrades to the farmers at no cost.

He said the market will be provided to the farmers that would need upfront support to be able to provide the required quantity of

the commodity to help achieve our aspirations, with guaranteed uptake of their produce during harvesting.

A contractual farming scheme has been introduced with the Agricultural Marketing Authority, which is for a 3-year term, with defined type, quantity, supply, and farm price to be paid to the farmers. A well-managed contract farming is an effective way to coordinate and promote production and marketing in agriculture.

"Through this scheme, farmers will get an interest free advance to support their farming activities, netted against final payment to the farmer for their produce. Most importantly, the farmers will not have to look for markets for their produce, which will significantly boost their confidence in the sector," said Dr. Reddy.

Since the launch of this initiative, whereby 44 farmers entered into a formal contractual arrangement with AMA, there has been an unprecedented level of interest across various communities.

"In the next three weeks, AMA will have over 200 farmers registered with the scheme focussing on key commodities that will assist in achieving our first milestone of \$1billion worth of agri-exports from Fiji."

He said each of these farmers would also become members of the Fiji National Provident Fund (FNPF) for the first time, securing them and their family's future.