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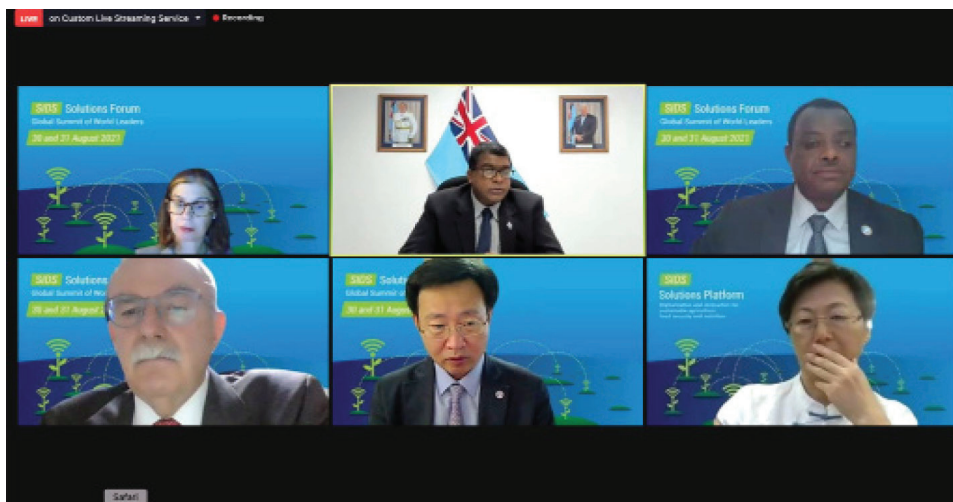
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SIDS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE EQUAL DIGITALIZATION STATUS: DR. REDDY



Delegates at the SIDS virtual meeting led by Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy - Minister for Agriculture.

Not all countries are at the same level of digitalization, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy remarked while virtually closing the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Solution Forum on 31st August.

He called on the Forum to identify the constraints and share their technical expertise to ensure that everyone grew together in achieving parity in levels of digitalization across all SIDS.

"The Forum showcased to us examples of innovation and digitalization for better agriculture, improved nutrition, and health, strengthening our adaptation to climate change and resilience, and with our own experience, we share knowledge recommending the best way forward to achieving the 2030 agenda," Dr. Reddy explained.

He said the meeting identified home grown solutions and harnessed innovation using

digitalization as a force multiplier that could accelerate the process.

Minister Reddy said the two-day meeting was a success where it identified avenues that could be achieved through the power of digitalization and innovation to fast track development of sustainable agri-food systems and secure the wellbeing and livelihood for the next generation.

"I look forward that the collaboration and partnership we have nurtured in the last 2 days, it is just the beginning of our future association and engagement that will promote our transformation towards the Sustainable Development Goals."

This Forum, he said, was the right platform to spearhead critical actions that led to meaningful changes and would change life for the better.



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CONSULTATIVE DIALOGUE BUILDS A STRONGER AND SUSTAINABLE PACIFIC COMMUNITY



PS Agriculture - Ritesh Dass closing the virtual Seventh Session of Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services meeting.

Given the current global challenges that confront the Pacific, a call was made to a regional forum to be united in a collective effort to ensure a progressive, clean and sustainable Pacific environment for its people.

While closing the three-day virtual Seventh Session of Pacific Heads of Agriculture and Forestry Services on 27 August, current

Chair and Fijian Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass said there was also a need to have a collective voice at global forums in the region's efforts to articulate important development issues that affect its people.

"It is only through consultative dialogue such as this that will enable us to build a

stronger and sustainable Pacific community," he said.

Mr. Dass said the forum was the best platform that demonstrated the traditional Pacific Way of engagement, highlighting the commitment towards collaboration with stakeholders, civil society organizations and development partners.

"In the past three days, we have discussed widely with our stakeholders, key important issues pertaining to Agriculture and Forestry services and how they impact our pursuit for the Sustainable Development Goals. I look forward, that as we depart from this meeting today, we will continue to work towards enhancing our development priorities to ensure that we successfully transform our food systems and maintain our biodiversity."

Today's final session included a continuation of regional country reports, food systems update, and presentations of best agriculture and forestry practices.

NEW COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE ORIENTED PROGRAMMES ANNOUNCED



Plastic farming technique.

Nine new agricultural support programmes tailor-made to boost commercial agriculture has been announced on 13 August.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy today announced these new commercial agriculture programmes which were earmarked to drive the sector forward, stating that the programmes were intrinsically linked to the vision of the new agriculture – "Grow Beyond".

"Through these new programmes, we are setting, brick by brick, the foundations to expand commercial agriculture, help develop more youths, women, households, farmers and landowners as successful agricultural

entrepreneurs while at the same time further increase exports, and increase households livelihood, income and quality of life and expand employment opportunities.

Hon. Reddy said the new Intensive Dairy Farms programme was targeted at setting up two intensive dairy farms in the country.

"As part of this programme, the Ministry would provide high yielding Brown Swiss dairy cows, establish pasture and corn, provide start-up supplementary feed for a year and establish fencing to ensure no intrusion of animals that could infect these new breeds with TB and Brucellosis.

Minister Reddy also detailed the

requisites to be eligible for the Hydroponics Kits – Nutrient Film Technique project which would include the setting-up of 400 plant size hydroponic systems at the recipient farmer's field. A total of 20 recipients who are set to benefit from this initiative will each receive a unit worth a value of \$5,500.00.

"This new programme will see recipients, who have shown the capability to sustainably operate these systems be awarded the support to venture into hydroponic farming, scalable to bigger capacity overtime. The Ministry will provide the full hydroponic set with required consumables for the first growing cycle," he said.

He also briefly explained plans to assist an additional 20 farmers through the Covered Greenhouse (Protected Agriculture) programme stating that the Greenhouses would be set up to ensure a consistent and pest free supply of seedlings and vegetables.

Additionally, Hon. Reddy outlined the assistance under the Irrigation Kits programme, as the Ministry would be inviting Expression of Interests for 150 irrigation sets to be distributed to notable drier areas of Fiji for agricultural growth and expansion.

"Each package will be inclusive of irrigation assistance (drip irrigation, in field laterals, sprinklers, water pumps, soaker hose, etc) and interested farmers will be required to contribute 20% of the total cost of the system, whilst the Ministry of Agriculture's direct

contribution will be 80% of the prescribed system.

Each irrigation kit is estimated to cost around \$2,000.

Minister Reddy said under the Fencing Kits programme, 340 livestock farmers would be provided with fencing material in order for them to upscale their livestock farming; "This will be split into 150 kits for beef cattle, 80 kits for goat farmers and 110 for sheep farms."

Furthermore, Hon. Reddy also announced the Small Farming Equipment Programme, which would incorporate the one third, two third assistance model of government assistance.

"We are looking at assisting 15 farmers. These implements are inclusive of mini-tractors, rotary tillers, front end loader attachments, cutters/shredders, mills and mini-dryers etc," he said.

"The combined value of machinery that can be bought through this assistance would be at a maximum value of \$18,000 per recipient," he added.

Hon. Reddy also announced the reviewed fruit trees which would be included to the current Orchard Development Programme and highlighted the importance and strategic inclusion of the Farmers Commercial Equity Package and Land Clearing Programme.

BACK TO RURAL AGRICULTURE (B2RA) KITS DISTRIBUTED



Minister for Agriculture-Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with the recipients of B2RA kits

Twenty-one Fijians whose livelihoods were impacted by COVID-19 through loss of formal employment received a "Back to Rural Agriculture" (B2RA) toolkit set each on 26 August.

These recent farmers and budding agricultural entrepreneurs received, as a start-up, a B2RA package each, which was worth \$400.00 per individual, consisting of \$250 worth of farming tools, \$100 worth of planting materials and \$50.00 cash, which can be used to procure any other needed items.

While officiating at the handing over of the kits at the Ministry of Agriculture's headquarters in Raiwaqa, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy challenged these pioneering recipients to prove their worth.

"Earlier this year, we had launched a programme called B2RA. The primary objective of the programme was to assist those households who had lost jobs in the urban area and have decided to move back to the rural areas with their family and utilise their vacant land and start up a business, an agricultural business. And we decided that in the first step, we would give them small leverage by providing them with a \$400.00 package.

"I want to further motivate the recipients and in other divisions participating via zoom that this is the beginning. Now go and prove yourselves, and show us, so that come later

this year, next year or the next financial year, there is substance for us to come and give you another leverage to assist you to expand your agricultural enterprise," he said.

"This is not the end. We want the total of 150 or so recipients who will be receiving the B2RA package to challenge us and say, we have proven our worth, we have proven ourselves, now can we get another leverage?

Minister Reddy also detailed some of the newly announced support programmes implemented by the Ministry which these recipients could be a part of in the future if they succeeded in their agricultural ventures through the B2RA programme.

"We believe in starting small and proving ourselves and for us to prove that this is a successful programme, you will have to prove that you are successful so that we can do justice for the next lot of recipients," he said.

Hon. Reddy also highlighted that the programme could be included as a budgeted programme under the Ministry's annual budgetary allocation, provided the B2RA recipients achieved tangible results and progress in their farming endeavour to support the Ministry's stance, as the current initiative was donor-funded.

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the recipients, Ms. Taraivini Senirewa from Buretu Village in Tailevu, who lost her job on 30th June 2020 said the only hope she, and

other's in a similar position as she had was returning to farming.

"On behalf of the recipients here in the Central Division, we would like to say thank you, vinaka vakalevu and dhanyavaad for the Back to Rural Agriculture initiative. When we lost our jobs, we had no other thoughts, the only thought that came to mind was that we had to go back to the villages and utilise our land.

"This morning, I wouldn't say we are lucky, I would say we are so blessed to have received these tools that we cannot afford to buy ourselves with what little we are earning now, thank you very much for this initiative and we look forward to inviting you to our farms to prove to you what we have done," said Ms. Senirewa.

Six recipients from within the Suva/Nausori corridor received their B2RA packages in Raiwaqa, while 13 recipients from Serua/Namosi received theirs at the Ministry of Agriculture Navua office with two recipients from Naitasiri receiving theirs at the Agriculture office in Vunidawa.

The B2RA toolkit includes one farm knife, a digging fork, one digging spade, a 20L water bucket, one Jerry Can (Water Can), an axe, one 50 meter rope, a tarpaulin set, and one set of shade cloth.

COMPOST FERTILISER DELIVERED TO RURAL VILLAGES



Unloading of compost fertilizer at Delaitoga village.

Forty villages on Viti Levu are targeted to receive compost fertilizer from the Ministry of Agriculture in the new financial year 2021-2022 with plans to expand the scope to include liquid organic fertilisers, reveals Agronomy Research Team, Senior Research Officer, Dr Tekini Nakidakida.

“This project will assist small holder farmers to continue farming without the need for chemical fertilisers. The compost fertilizer

will sustain their soils and reduce pollution in rivers, streams and coastal areas,” Dr Nakidakida explained.

He said reduction on the reliance of chemical fertilisers would only be realized through ‘just transition’.

“It will be easier for small holder farms to make the switch to organic fertilisers. Taking that into consideration and the need to reduce chemical pollution of watersheds, we

chose remote communities or villages in the highlands and along the coast,” he said.

He added that these rural communities were advised on how to apply the finished compost, given they were already using manure on their farms.

Dr. Nakidakida added that 40 villages were targeted in the last financial year and distribution was currently underway in the Central and Western Divisions.

“Medium and large scale farms will be targeted in this financial year 2021-22, after more awareness of the need to adapt to sustainable production systems.”

Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass had said the Organic Initiative of the Ministry targeted to reduce Fiji’s consumption on chemical fertilisers, improve soil health and soil carbon, improve soil biodiversity and sustain agricultural land for long term food security.

He pleaded with farmers to practice sustainable agriculture and not to abusively apply chemical fertilisers.

“Agriculture is very vulnerable to climate change and it is only with Climate Smart Agriculture that we can sustain our food system and socio-economic well-being,” Mr. Dass said.

The Permanent Secretary said the Ministry understood the importance of chemical fertilisers and recognized their contribution to the economy, at the same time, it was mindful of protecting and sustaining agricultural soils for long term food and nutrition security.

This project is one of five new programmes of the Ministry announced in the Budget for 2021-2022 called the ‘Promotion and Production of Organic Fertiliser Programme’ with a funding of \$190,000.00.

Castration Exercise By Ra Team

Ra Team carried out castration exercises on 22 bulls at Nausori Village, 5 bulls at Tova, and 2 bulls at Cavakuka.

Undertaking this exercise was Fieldman Animal Health & Production Epeli Misimisi, Agriculture Technical Officer Ra Crops Extension Viniana, Senior Agriculture Officer Beef/Dairy Ulaiasi, and Stockman Dobuilevu Lemeki at Cavakuka, Narau.





Do Your Best: A Revitalized Makereta Encourages Colleagues

A short stint at the Ministry of Agriculture Headquarters to recuperate following a short medical illness has left AO Nadroga/Navosa, Makereta Rasukamaimaleya refreshed and impatient to get back into the field to help farmers.

“It’s been awhile now, I’ve been here in Suva on medical grounds for five months. I’ve been in HQ for three weeks. I’ve seen how HQ operations work and the challenges I faced will help me in the field,” she said.

“I feel there is a lot we need to do to

contribute to the initiatives, the programs and the Business Plan. We need to prepare ourselves so we can better serve our farmers.”

She said the time she had been away from her family in Sigatoka had been difficult but now it was time to return.

“My advice to officers who will be returning to their stations - just do your best because there is a lot for us to achieve in terms of the outputs for this new financial year.”

We wish you the best, Makereta.



CHANDRIKA APPLAUDS MoA FOR TIMELY SERVICE

A Farmer in Rakiraki who had lost all hope for his sick cow, is thankful to the Agriculture Team in the West for helping him.

Mr Chandrika Prasad, 65, who resides on Ellington Wharf Road, Rakiraki explained he was very sad because his cow was sick and could not walk, after giving birth.

Mr. Prasad said he was grateful to Head of Agriculture Operations, Dr Vinesh Kumar for coming to his rescue and providing valuable advice that managed to, not only save the life of his cow but the animal was fully recovered the day after.

Dr. Kumar said the cow suffered from milk fever - a metabolic disorder caused by insufficient calcium that was common in new and old mothers.

“The condition generally occurs within first 24 hours of post-calving. I am a trained Para Vet and seasoned Livestock officer. I advised the farmer to return home, provide shade to the cow, try to give fluids – sugar and water, while I arranged to open the clinic and check for drugs for the cow,” Dr Kumar said.

The four-men team led by Dr Kumar included Senior Agriculture Officer - Ra, Operator Pravin, and Agriculture Officer - Ba, provided treatment, secured the cow under a shelter and advised the farmer of its after-care.



Dr. Vinesh Kumar (1st from left) attends to the sick cow in Rakiraki.

LIVESTOCK TEAM UTILISE WELLNESS FOR CROP AND VEGETABLE GARDEN



Dairy Research staff busy in their vegetable plot in Koronivia.

Wellness Wednesday for the Livestock Research Unit under the Animal Health and Production Division became a more meaningful activity following the creation of a crop and vegetable garden for the team.

For the last few Wednesdays, the team spent their wellness hour clearing and starting off their garden located at the entrance to the Livestock Section.

Agriculture Officer (Dairy Research) Bharat Kumar said the new wellness program began in May when COVID-19 positive numbers skyrocketed in the Central Division.

“Livestock is restricted from grazing at the front entrance, near the main road so weeds have overgrown there and the team thought to utilize that piece of land and turn it into a garden. The old office was demolished during the Suva/ Nausori road upgrade, and since then the proposed quarter-acre land for the new Livestock Research office was left idle,” he said.

Staff brought in a variety of vegetable seedlings such as cabbage, coriander, eggplant, chillies, long bean, French bean, radish, cucumber, kumala and cassava with assistance provided by the Crop Research Section to plough the land.

“Apart from the normal Wednesday

wellness activities of playing soccer, rugby, volleyball and walking, this new activity will keep the front area clean and also make it productive and attractive,” Bharat said.

Since the project started, interest from the staff on developing or expanding their home garden has grown.

The team was thrilled to enjoy their first harvest, cooking their freshly picked

veggies from their garden to relish together as a team.

The Livestock Research Unit is in charge of milking and calf rearing, paddock renovation, spraying, weeding, fertilizer application, silage making, monitoring animal growth rate, drenching, hoof trimming, pasture development, stock feeding, and pig rearing.



Dairy Research staff harvest their cabbage.

PHOTO GALLERY



Serua/Namosi and Beqa farmers receiving their B2RA Kits at Navua Agriculture Office.



Agriculture Officials in Ba attending to a cattle on a farm.



Dr. Vinesh Kumar with team west exploring new areas to increase rice production in collaboration with BAT.



Dr. Ashnita Prasad (right) assisting in a Desexing Campaign held in Lautoka by Greater Good Foundation, FNU Vets and volunteers.



Senior Agriculture Officials - Mr. Ulaiasi Cagivou and Mr. Berlin Alfred at the Naimarai Station.



Animal Health & Production staff utilising their wellness day constructing new gate and pavement for Vatuwaqa Station.



Carrot planting in the highlands.



Research Officials during a site visit, inspecting chemical storage area at Max Value in Nausori.