



AGRICULTURE *Newsletter*

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Lomaivuna Sector Praised for Agricultural Vision



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy hands over the award to a farmer during the Lomaivuna Mini-Agriculture Show

The eight farming sectors of Lomaivuna in the province of Naitasiri have received praise for their foresight in recognizing and promoting the impact that agriculture has on their livelihoods.

A mini-agriculture show was organized by the Lomaivuna Development Council (LDC) and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture on Friday, August 26, 2022 at the Nawere Methodist Church compound in Lomaivuna as part of the LDC's plans for greater exposure of local farming commodities and as a showcase of agricultural production.

While delivering his opening statement at the mini-agriculture show, Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, said the agriculture model in Naitasiri is an exemplary model for the other provinces in Fiji.

"I want to thank the people of Naitasiri for their contribution towards the growth and development of the country, particularly here in Lomaivuna as we celebrate your success in the agriculture sector."

"As we looked around as we were approaching, we saw examples of sustainable agriculture practices,

agricultural undertakings in areas where some may think that you can't do agriculture, but because you've undertaken sustainable agriculture practices, these areas which initially was seen as not arable for agriculture are now indeed arable for agriculture, so thank you for developing a sustainable agriculture model that can be emulated by the other provinces of Fiji," said Minister Reddy.

The support and technical guidance provided by the Ministry of Agriculture for all farmers in the Lomaivuna area was also reaffirmed by Hon. Reddy. He emphasized the importance of making sure that the public infrastructure is accessible to all farmers and agribusinesses in order to ensure their continued growth.

"I also want to congratulate the eight sectors in Lomaivuna and the 272 households for leading in some of the crop areas, especially in ginger, dalo, and other areas as well. They may not be industry leaders, but they are significant players in the sector, and it is noteworthy to mention that 90% of the ginger that is produced in Fiji comes from this province, and 40% of the dalo produced in the country comes from this

province," he said. According to Minister Reddy, the farmers of Lomaivuna and Naitasiri as a whole were model farmers and possessed immense knowledge that could be shared with farmers across the nation to help them learn best agricultural practices to implement on their farms.

"Today's event is a leap towards expanding your agriculture business and meeting potential clients. People will converge here today for this mini-food agriculture show, and I urge you farmers to seize this opportunity to promote yourself, your exchanges, meet other experts, and get advice from the Ministry officials on new technology and explore new opportunities," said Minister Reddy.

During the mini-agriculture show, nine farmers received awards for their agricultural endeavours. Prizes were given out for the best farmers of ginger, dalo, assorted vegetables, cassava, vanilla, yam, fruit trees, women, and poultry, respectively.

Following the success of the one-day event, the Lomaivuna Mini-Agriculture Show is expected to become an annual event.

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Costed Operation Plan to encourage the agricultural industry to “Grow Beyond”



PS Agriculture presenting his keynote address during the COP launching at Raiwaqa headquarters

The Ministry of Agriculture staff have been urged by the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Mr. Vinesh Kumar, to take ownership of the 2022–2023 Costed Operation Plan document and steer the agriculture industry toward becoming the main engine of Fiji’s economic expansion.

The statement was made by PS Kumar at the launch of the Ministry’s 2022–2023 COP at the Ministry’s headquarters in Raiwaqa on Friday, August 19, 2022. He said that the plan would help to lead the Ministry’s stance toward its “Grow Beyond” strategic goal.

The 2022/2023 COP for the Ministry of Agriculture includes all funded programs, ensuring food and income security as well as sustainable livelihoods for all Fijians, with the goal of enhancing community resilience.

“The plan includes the output expected from the Ministry through the 28 direct farming assistance offered to farmers Fiji wide,” he said.

The COP also emphasizes each division’s roles, responsibilities, alignment with pertinent business plans, and subsequent individual work plans.

“All functional divisions have incorporated the assistance and have subsequently provided

planned targets that are measurable, time bound, and achievable.”

PS Kumar said the development framework approved by the COP “reflects the five thematic areas and key priorities highlighted in the MoA Strategic Development Plan and is not isolated from the national development plan as an overarching outlook.”

For the government’s vision for Fiji’s agriculture sector and the livelihood of the populace to be realized, the COP must be delivered successfully. Together, he said, “we can create a sector that will support our economy and its people in a sustainable, resilient, and competitive manner.

Using the recently unveiled Costed Operation Plan, which is geared toward slow but steady growth, the Ministry will continue to interact with stakeholders and international partners, pioneering a paradigm shift in the agricultural sector.

“In this COP, we are focusing on strengthening friendly ties with our development partners to effectively meet the demand from the sectors.”

“Our services can only be extremely effective if we all sit down and collaborate with one another to be able to realize tangible, significant outcomes that can be achieved efficiently with due economy,” he said.

Additionally, the Ministry will ensure that the COP document is continuously monitored to identify program sustainability and associated risks.

The COP integrates the vision through the “Food Security, Agriculture Growth and Expansion Strategy” and uses the Ministry’s five- and twenty-year National Plans as a guide. It seeks to reduce inequalities, ensure social protection of individuals from various vulnerabilities, and empower communities to ensure Fijians have access to food and nutrition security.



PS Agriculture, Senior Agriculture Officials and Stakeholders during the launching of the 2022 - 2023 Costed Operational Plan.



Bacterium Culture Initiative Revamped with Renewed calls for more Organic Farming



SRO Agronomy Penaia Mua presenting on Bacterium Culture and the importance of Organic Farming

In order to adopt more sustainable agricultural practices and practice more organic farming methods, farmers and agricultural entrepreneurs across the nation are being urged to change their focus and review their farming practices.

This was the call made by the Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, while revamping the Ministry's Bacterium Culture Initiative at its Legalega Research Station in Nadi on Thursday 18 August, 2022.

The Minister emphasized the importance of identifying more efficient and environmentally friendly alternatives to maintain food production in the country, citing rising fertilizer costs and their subsequent negative impacts on farming systems as a heavy toll to pay for Fiji's agriculture sector in the future.

"To ensure the sustainability of our natural resources, organic agriculture has been incorporated into Fiji's production system. Giving plants the nutrients they require through the use of organic fertilizers is healthier.

"The best news is that cultivation improves when compost is made using Bacterium culture and applied to the soil. It also permits the gradual release of nutrients from the soil, which the plants can eventually absorb," Minister Reddy said.

"When the soil is disease-suppressive, the roots become healthy and exude substances that are dependent on composition, allowing for gradual soil remediation."

Since its launch on June 10th, 2020, the Bacterium Culture initiative has seen the

establishment of 40 Bacterium Culture tanks in agriculture stations around the country—seven in the Central Division, 15 in the Western Division, two in the Eastern Division, and 16 in the North.

"Farmers are encouraged to bring their own containers and collect bacterium cultures from these locations free of charge. Apart from establishing these tanks in the agriculture offices, we have also established 13 bacterium culture tanks in various farming communities," said Minister Reddy.

"The Ministry has distributed 1,300 litres of pure bacterium culture, which is then diluted at a ratio of 10 litres of water to 1 litre of bacterium culture (13,000 litres of diluted) for farmers to use in adding directly to their crops or assisting in making compost.

Additionally, Hon. Reddy has urged individual farmers, groups of farmers, villages, settlements, and larger communities to begin

making their own compost and to use the Bacterium culture to hasten and improve it.

"The Ministry will continue its efforts to reach out to our rural communities and provide the essential training and support to farmers," he said. "Organic agriculture can be enhanced through the use of sustainable technologies and reduced use of synthetic chemicals."

The Ministry not only provides bacterium culture, but also produces compost. To date, 150 tonnes of compost have been produced and distributed to communities, backyard farmers, and stakeholders with an interest in organic farming. The Ministry will help 10 organic farmers in the establishment of organic inputs during the 2022–2023 fiscal year.

Additionally, 10 communities will receive assistance in the establishment of compost sites. In addition, this fiscal year, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to produce and distribute 100 tonnes of organic compost.



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with the farmers during the revamping of the Bacterium Culture in Legalega, Nadi.

Rewa Farmers Urged to Grow Rice for Food Security



AA Lakena Sowinden Tekairaba (2nd from right) with the Kibbutz farmers group showing their first harvest of Star variety rice

Acting Senior Agriculture Officer (Rewa) Unaisi Remudu has urged Rewa delta farmers to plant rice in order to provide for their livelihoods and to ensure their food and nutritional security.

This was shared by Ms. Remudu after the first Star variety rice was harvested by the Kibbutz farmers group, a farming community in Lokia, Rewa, who were beneficiaries of the Ministry's Communal Rice initiative.

These are consistent with the Ministry's initiatives to lower current rice import costs and achieve self-sufficiency. "Due to very few farmers' involvement in this crop over the past three years, rice production in the Rewa province has been very low," said Ms Remudu.

"Through this initiative, farmers in our communities are urged to prioritize growing rice for food and nutrition security as well as to improve their livelihoods."

The Ministry provided rice seeds, agricultural inputs, rice harvesting equipment, and advisory services to the cluster.

According to Apisalome Tuilawaki, a Kibbutz Farmers' Group representative, the group's involvement in the Communal Rice Initiative has allowed them to grow a crop to feed the surrounding area. One acre of land has been set aside by the group for rice farming.

"We harvested 26 25kg bags last week from the initial three bags given by the Ministry through the initiative, and we would like to thank the Ministry for its assistance," he said.

"We would like to assist our communities in providing a staple food they can consume at home, locally grown, instead of going to stores and markets to purchase it," said Apisalome.

"It is not new to us, but we are reviving and planting it as a group because doing so has health and wealth benefits. We are not only

doing this for the benefit of our own families and communities but also because doing so has benefits for all of us," he said.

There are nine men who work as part of the Kibbutz farmers group, which was founded in 2018.

They farm dalo, cassava, and kumala. Within the Ministry's \$400,000 budgetary allocation for the Rice Farming Program in 2021–2022, \$30,000 was given to the Rewa province.



2022-2023 Financial Year Agriculture Development Programmes Announced



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy presenting the 27 agricultural support programmes in Nadi.

The Ministry of Agriculture announced 27 agricultural support programmes to boost agriculture development in the country for increased productivity and to boost foreign exchange earnings from the sector.

The 27 programmes feature recurring development programmes that were implemented during the last 2021-2022 financial year with the inclusion of some new and revitalized programmes that are targeted at further promoting the expansion of commercial agriculture in the country.

While announcing the programmes on Thursday 4 August at the Legalega Research Station in Nadi, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the programmes complemented current efforts undertaken by the Ministry.

Hon. Reddy reaffirmed the Ministry of Agriculture's allocation of \$29.2million would be provided directly to support farmers to maintain a sustainable level of national food security and to boost their production which would in turn create more surplus for exports.

"These programs will help farmers deal with the costs of stabilizing markets post-pandemic, cushion the effects of the Russian and Ukrainian conflicts, raise farm outputs and boost exports.

"The 27 initiatives, along with other farmers' direct support, total more than \$29.2 million equivalent to 45 percent of the total 2022-2023 Ministry of Agriculture budget. This is the largest post-production, supply, and export package ever," said Minister Reddy.

Consequently, the support provided will be divided into two categories:

- (I) For individuals who have never received MoA assistance before and;
- (II) For those who have received assistance in the past and have established themselves well, can now expand their farming businesses even further.

The 27 programmes are further grouped as follows and have their own respective requirements per programme:

The Commercial Agriculture Crop Farming Initiatives encompasses Farm Shed Support programme, Hydroponics Farming System Support, Irrigation Kit Support, Borehole Support, Small Farming and Agro-Processing

Equipment, Women in Agriculture, Fruit Tree Orchard Development and Organic Development programme.

The Commercial Agriculture Livestock Farming Initiatives include Fencing Kit Support for Beef, Goat and Sheep respectively, Beef Stock Yard, Goat Shed, Goat Rearing, Sheep Shed, Small Holder Dairy, Pig Farrowing Crates, Piggery Pan Development, Home Biogas Digester and Poultry Shed programme.

Additionally, Farm Mechanization initiatives include Small Farming Equipment and Agro-processing machines, Yaqona Commercial Farming Equipment, Farm Mechanization, and Rice Harvester.

There are also allocations for the continuation of the Commercial Farmers Equity Package, Land Preparation for Young Commercial Farmers and Infrastructure Support to Exporters and Agro-Processors and subsequently, the allocation of \$7million going towards the outsourcing of Agriculture machinery for the hiring of tractors, diggers and bulldozers for land clearing and preparation work.

The 27 programs were advertised online and will remain open till 9 September 2022," said Minister Reddy.

"The information on the initiatives can be electronically accessed on the Ministry of Agriculture website. We encourage farmers, agribusiness owners, and agro exporters to apply for this assistance," he added.

The application packages for these programmes are available via the Ministry of Agriculture website on www.agriculture.gov.fj and its social media platforms.



PHOTO GALLERY



Handing over of rice harvester by Hon Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama to the Laqere rice cluster group in Tabia



Ministry farewell outgoing Senior Veterinary Officer Dr. Keresi Lomata who has taken up a post in Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF)



Ministry farewell SAO Cakaudrove Mr Ilisoni Banuve



Ministry staff assisting farmers to fill out the online application forms



MoA staff during the launching of the 2022-2023 MoA COP Document at the Raiwaqa basement



The Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Vinesh Kumar with Ministry staff and stakeholders during the Ministry of Agriculture's Costed Operation Plan Consultation



Participants of the technical assistance for the support to Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Programme, Fiji training at Suvavou House, Level 9



Staff of Legalega Research Station in the process of winnowing urd seed for seed selection and storage