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GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES \$250 CASH ASSISTANCE FOR FARMERS AFFECTED BY TC CODY



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the announcement of the Agriculture Household Care Assistance.

Government announced that \$250 cash assistance would be given to farmers that were affected by TC Cody. The public announcement was made by the Acting Prime Minister, Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum on January 15. In a follow up press conference, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy on January 17 explained the online applications would need to meet a strict criteria before affected farmers were considered eligible for the \$250 cash assistance.

"All farm households that sustained up to 30per cent crop damage or 10per cent loss of livestock would be eligible to apply for the \$250 cash assistance which is for land preparation, cultivation, and procurement of planting materials.

"We want affected farmers to quickly return to land preparation, cultivation and procuring of planting materials so they can get back to

their original growth trajectory. The \$250 cash is to allow the affected farmer to quickly hire a tractor, bullock, or horse or pay fuel for his own tractor to begin the farm work," he said. However, he added, Agriculture officers would be verifying the information provided by the farmers via the online application form.

"We have a list of areas that were affected and we will be verifying the information received. If farmers are not able to access the online application, then they can go to their nearest Agriculture office where someone will assist them to enter their details. Online applications close on January 26.

We hope to begin the payouts via MPAISA and MyCash on February 4. When the applications close, we will continue the verification process until we hope to have it wrapped up by February 4," Dr Reddy said. He reiterated, 'no farm inspection, no assistance'.

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AGRICULTURE MINISTER TOURS FLOOD AFFECTED AREAS



Minister - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (left) with PS Agriculture - Mr. Vinesh Kumar during their visit to flood affected areas in the West.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy visited parts of the Western Division which were affected by floodwaters. He visited the settlements of Nabitu, Lokia, Kavanagasau and Nadrala on the Sigatoka River East Bank and

Nasau settlement, Waqadra, Bila, Sabeto and Qeleloa settlement in Nadi.

Minister Reddy shared the details of the TC Cody Rehabilitation Package - Household Care programme with affected farmers and urged them to apply for the assistance as the need to rehabilitate affected farms was a priority for the Fijian Government.

"We want to reach out to all farmers who have been affected by the flood. We are only targeting full time

farmers to receive the assistance. If you're not affected, please do not apply, be considerate of those who really need the \$250.00 assistance," Dr. Reddy told farmers.

"The notion behind the assistance is to get

farmers quickly back on their feet. "How you use the money is up to you, you can hire tractors to plough your damaged fields, hire tractors to prepare your fields or buy planting materials and seeds or fertilizers, as long as you use it for its intended purpose that's perfectly fine," said Hon. Reddy.

"However, I urge you to apply online for this assistance if you were genuinely affected, if 30% or more of your farms were damaged and your only source of income is farming, you're eligible to apply. There are no requirements apart from the above, if 30% or more of your farm was damaged, or if 10% or more of your livestock was affected, you can apply," he added.

Minister Reddy also elaborated that the deadline for applications was the 26th of January as there was an urgent need to roll out the program during the first week of February in order for affected farmers to receive this fast-cash roll out assistance as soon as possible.

DRONE TECHNOLOGY AND DIGITAL REAL-TIME DATA COLLECTION HELPS AGRICULTURE SPEED UP DAMAGE ASSESSMENT DUE TO TC CODY



Minister - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (right) with PS Agriculture - Mr. Vinesh Kumar and PRO Land Use - Dr. Tekini Nakidakida during their visit to flood affected areas in the West.

Aerial view of farms affected by TC Cody

Drone technology was used for the first time by the Ministry of Agriculture to assist with the Initial Damage Assessments (IDA) conducted to gauge the extent of losses sustained during the recent floods caused by TC Cody. Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Dr. Vinesh Kumar explained it was an exciting time for the Ministry to utilize modern technology for efficiency and accuracy.

PS Kumar said it was the first time the Ministry had used drone technology to provide aerial coverage of flood affected areas during the IDA exercise. The drone was used first in the Central Division, in Rewa, Tailevu, and Naitasiri before it was moved down to the West for the same purpose.

"Using the drone will provide us with a clearer and wider view of the flood damages during TC Cody and it will help us match the data collated via the Digital data collection Toolbox that is used by our officers conducting the ground assessments, data collected is in real time, as well as the damage forecast done by our Economic Planning and Statistics team in a shorter timespan. This will allow us to have a much better indication of the extent of damages and come up with solutions to assist our farmers get back on their feet," he added.

He said the use of the Kobo Toolbox software was first used following TC's Yasa and Ana in 2020 and early 2021 and actually sped up the IDA exercise by the officers.

In addition, the Permanent Secretary said almost 200 officers from the Ministry were engaged in the IDA exercise, which was coming to a conclusion to make way for the Detailed Damage Assessment (DDA).

"Prior to the digital data collection toolbox, we used to manually fill out forms with farmers to make the damage assessments. Those days are gone now, thanks to the use of handheld tablets and smart phones has significantly improved our work. The old method has become inconvenient, cumbersome, and unsustainable. Now, the officers are using tablets to quickly capture data which is synched to our headquarters and we are able to watch real time data come through quickly and as such we are able to complete field assessments faster and cover a lot of ground," he said. "This data allows us to make informed decisions and we share this information to the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) as well."

The IDA exercise is an immediate response by the Ministry following any natural disaster. It is usually done when it is deemed safe to move around and is undertaken by the locality officers on the ground within the next three days. Depending on the extent of the damage, will determine the number of officers and resources to be deployed.

The data collated is then used by the Ministry to design a quick rehab package to assist the affected farmers to return to some degree of normalcy.

MAKE USE OF UNLIMITED COMMERCIAL KAVA ACCESS INTO AUSTRALIA, KAVA STAKEHOLDERS URGED



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy at Holiday Inn, Suva during the National Kava Committee Meeting.

Kava stakeholders were encouraged to make use of the opportunity presented by the Australian Government in allowing the commercial export of the commodity into its borders.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said it was the opportune time for Fijians to tap into the Australian market and explore what the Australian market could offer to the kava industry.

“The pilot program that was announced by Australian Prime Minister, Hon. Scott Morrison in October 2019 recognises the deep cultural significance of kava for Pacific Island communities both in Australia and across the Pacific region.

The pilot program will support broader efforts under ‘The Pacific Step-Up’ to increase stronger cultural and economic ties between Australia and Pacific Island nations,” Hon. Dr Reddy explained.

Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport, Hon. Faiyaz Siddiq Koya who officiated at the event said the Government worked hard to gain access into the Australian market and was successful.

“With the success of the first phase of the

kava pilot program, allowing an increase in the personal importation of kava from 2kg to 4kg into Australia – the second phase of this programme has commenced from 1st December 2021.

“Essentially this means that Fijians can now commercially export kava to Australia with no limit in quantity, provided they meet all the regulatory requirements,” he said.

In addition, Hon. Koya said the task of negotiating market access took years for fruition.

“Hence, we cannot risk losing important markets, because some exporters are not willing to follow the minimum quality standards. Compromising the quality of kava or the market entry requirements will be a blunder we will regret forever.

“This is why kava quality and standard should be of utmost importance to Fiji and Fijian exporters. The Fijian brand is synonymous with high quality, pristine, clean and high-end products. Hence, the brand should never be tainted for quick-wins,” Minister Koya explained.

AGRITOURISM PROGRAMME LINKING HOTELS TO FARMING CLUSTERS ANNOUNCED



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy and senior management during the announcement of the inception of a new agritourism programme.

As part of efforts to increase the engagement of communities with large tracts of idle land located close to hotels to actively involve themselves in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture has announced the inception of a new agritourism programme.

The Our Community Agriculture (OCA) pro-

gramme will set up hotels to their neighbouring communities and help these communities supply their produce to the hotels.

While making the announcement on 7 January, the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said identifying opportunities to amplify linkages

between the agriculture and tourism sectors remained a key priority given the interdependence and employment opportunities both these sectors each offered.

“The Ministry wishes to engage communities with idle land, near hotels to engage in farming and supply their produce to the nearest hotel. In doing so, we will be able to utilise new land for agriculture and raise agricultural output.

“Additionally, we are encouraging hotels to utilize locally grown produce and by connecting our hotels to local communities, we contribute to their improved livelihood by transferring income in exchange for fresh farm produce,” he said.

Minister Reddy said that the programme was being implemented as a means to boost the share of tourist spending retention in the local economy and to address the importation of produce by the tourism sector to meet the demand at the tourist table by strengthening linkages between the hotel and farmers through agritourism initiatives.

The Ministry of Agriculture Agritourism Initia-

tive OCA will focus on youth groups, women's groups, co-operatives and clusters of farmers in communities close to hotels and resorts.

"Each community group, consisting of at least 5 households, in a village or settlement, will be provided \$600.00 per acre for a maximum of 5 acres, (a total of \$3000), to clear, prepare and cultivate the land with vegetables or root crops with the intention to supply 100 per cent of their harvest to the nearest hotel," said Hon. Reddy.

"For phase 1, we are targetting a total of 30 farming groups. Noting \$3,000.00 per group,

we have a total budget of \$90,000.00 for this program and for phase 1, we are limiting to one group per hotel," he added.

The disbursement of the selected farmers' groups will see 12 farmers' clusters from the Western Division, 8 from the Central Division, 6 farmers' clusters from the Northern Division with 4 clusters from the Eastern Division being a part of the first phase of the OCA programme.

The OCA programme will include land clearing, land preparation, the provision of planting materials, cultivation, and farming equipment.

The Ministry will work closely together with

the identified clusters of farmers, groups and co-operatives to supply fresh and value-added commodities to resorts and hotels.

Interested farming clusters must be located within 2 kilometres from their nearest hotel/resort and must provide evidence of ownership of up to 5 acres of land. Clusters must also have a minimum of 5 households and must be registered with the Ministry of Agriculture. Additionally, interested farming groups must also provide the support letter from their nearest hotel indicating proof of partnership with respective farming clusters.

FARMERS URGED TO MAKE USE OF LOCALITY OFFICERS



Agriculture Officer - Lusi Tumaitoga conducting the training

The Ministry of Agriculture's presence in rural farming locations must be utilized by the farming communities as technical knowledge shared by locality officers is critical for the development of agricultural-based undertakings.

It is equally important for farmers and locality officers to maintain working relationships

and for farmers to take heed of technical information shared during scheduled farm visits and meetings. This was shared by the Senior Agriculture Officer (Naitasiri) Apenisa Rarasea when speaking to Mataqali Natusasa of Vunidawa Village, Serea during the recent Farming as a Business training to farmers of the Mataqali at Nawaqabena in Naitasiri.

Mataqali Natusasa has also recently launched the 'Natusasa Concept', a development based plan targeted at improving the livelihoods of their members.

"Farming has always been a way of life for most of us here and the potential is great in the area for more development to be brought here," he said.

"You are all experienced farmers and there are techniques that you have been following that allows you to excel in your production and this training is being brought here to boost your potential and elevate your living and farming standards to another level."

He also urged farmers to make use of the agriculture station near them for assistance and technical advice.

"There is assistance provided, and you should feel free to access the assistance with your locality officers for your farms and the concept that the Mataqali has initiated," he said.

"It is empowering to take note of the initiative the Mataqali is taking towards the betterment and building of a secured farming plan, this different direction will create an impact if you take heed of the farming as business training you have been a part of."

Mataqali Natusasa development committee member Elenoa Nimacere said the Natusasa Development concept is a generational prosperity concept; "Through this concept, we will be able to have a better standard of living, better houses, clean drinking water and electricity," she said.

"It will put food on the table, improve health conditions and provide better education for our future generations and enhance our contribution to social obligations."

The Natusasa concept is designed for its members, who have each been allocated 5-acre lots per farmer from the Mataqali land, with a target to undertake farming to gradually improve their standard of living.

CREATING WEALTH FROM THE LAND – MATAQALI NATUSASA SETS DEVELOPMENT PLAN



Participants of the Farm Management Training at Nawaqabena.

Taking ownership of their natural resources and creating wealth from their land is at the top of the priority list for Mataqali Natusasa.

Following a 3-day Farm Management training held at Nawaqabena for 29 members of Mataqali (landowning unit) Natusasa in Vunidawa village, Serea, Naitasiri their knowledge on implementing business models on their farms was reinvigorated as they now look to better days ahead and view farming as a business as a beacon of hope and a way forward.

Prior to the Farm Management training conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Mataqali had already developed the 'Natusasa Concept' whereby members were allocated 5 acres each of their Mataqali land with the vision to undertake farming as a stepping stone towards further development for their Mataqali.

Mataqali Natusasa development committee member Elenoa Nimacere said the development plan was earmarked to empower the members living in the village to create wealth by fully utilizing their land which had been classified by the Ministry's Land Use Section as suitable, arable land for crop farming.

"Our way forward is such that after each lot owner of the subdivided 5-acres per family receives their Land Use and Farm Management plan, the development committee will help

them reach their goal in helping with planting material from within the Mataqali members and the other organizations including the Ministry of Agriculture," she said.

"From next month all farmers have planned to be in their subdivided land and camp for a week and operate in clusters starting with land preparation."

Ms Nimacere said the development committee members will monitor and evaluate the impact progress every month and meet with the farmers to resolve problems that stunts progress.

"We have asked the Ministry of Agriculture to start a task force with us so we can work together and help us to reach the goals of each individual, the Mataqali and the Yavusa."

As for training participant Sekonaia Rawaimila, attending the training has been a blessing for him as he was accustomed only to the traditional farming methods with little to no regard for farming as a business.

"The training has truly broadened my knowledge on various farming practices and business models and I will surely implement it so it has a greater impact on my life and my family," said Mr Rawaimila.

Meanwhile, Senior Agriculture Officer (Farm

Management) Ms Naomi Naiqumu said the training was intended to empower the farmers to treat their farming not only as a business but as a rewarding form of employment too.

"A major component of the training is to teach farmers' the basics of farm planning as most are subsistence farmers and to impart the importance of having goals and setting and implementing the plans to help achieve those goals," she said.

A majority of the farmers are dalo farmers who contribute to the total 40% dalo production rate from the province of Naitasiri.

Additionally, the training was also to empower them to understand their land classes, soil type and the type of crops suitable to plant on their land which would encourage them to take ownership of their natural resources and its sustainable usage for the benefit of their future generations.

"Their main commodity is dalo, apart from dairy, and seeing as they are located in a rural area, the need to enlighten them to boost their farming to another level and to treat it as a business, with us also sharing the various development initiatives that are available to them is vital to see that they do indeed grow and develop," said Ms Naiqumu.

PHOTO GALLERY



Delivery of fencing kits to a farmer in Karoko, Tunuloa, Cakaudrove



Farmers who attended the guava orchard management training in SRS



TB Testing by BTEC team



Bees team pose for a photo after the establishment of a Queen Breeding Center on Makogai Island



Ministry staff continue seed packing in Labasa



Ministry staff packing home gardening seeds at Lakena Agriculture Station



The use of drone technology to conduct aerial survey during IDA after by TC Cody



SRS staff being proactive as they move one of the station's water pump to higher grounds during TC Cody