



# Agriculture NEWSLETTER



July - August Issue 2020

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## MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE LAUNCHES 2020-2021 COP



PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass (right)  
launches the new 2020-2021 Costed Operational Plan  
Document with PS Forestry Mr. Pene Baleinabuli

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'Let's double our effort and be smart about how we can realize our aspirations,' urged Ministry of Agriculture's Permanent Secretary, Mr. Ritesh Dass to his senior management while launching the Ministry's 2020 - 2021 Costed Operational Plan (COP) on 13 August 2020.

Mr. Dass said the COP was the Ministry's working document that specified measurable targets, time-bound against quantity and quality of activities that would enable the successful achievement of the five Strategic Priority targets.

"We will have to work doubly hard, doubly smart, in order to realize our aspiration. We have stretch targets, we have stretch goals, but we are confident we will achieve it."

"Through this COP the Ministry captures effective and efficient use of resources to ensure sound management of Government assets," he said.

The Permanent Secretary said using the National Development Plan as the Ministry's compass, COP further incorporated the greater vision of the Hon. Minister for Agriculture, Dr. Mahendra Reddy on 'Food Security, Agriculture Growth and Expansion Strategy.'

Mr. Dass said with Commercial Agriculture as one of the strategic priorities,

broad partnerships with organisations was critical in building resilient and social protection systems that could weather shocks, create economic opportunities for farmers and groups, promote equality and design a new generation of resilient green jobs that supported youth-led entrepreneurship.

"The Ministry will ensure a systematic monitoring of the COP document that will identify the sustainability of any project, time constraints and associated risks.

"This will mean that the Ministry will continuously improve its targets which will subsequently ensure access to quality food and enhance economic opportunities," he said.

The Permanent Secretary said achieving these outcomes, allowed Fijian households to put nutritious quality food on the table, and at the same time contribute to the vision of 'Transforming Fiji'.

He said the successful delivery of this COP was critical to achieving the Government's vision for the agriculture sector and the livelihoods of its people.

"The Ministry through the COP documents is gearing up its efforts to operationalize its aspirations of 'Grow Beyond'. The new ideology now on modernizing agriculture, offers both an exciting opportunity that will set a plethora of positive possibilities."

# NATIONAL SOIL HEALTH CARD LAUNCHED



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Reddy with farmers who received their National Soil Health Card in Muaniweni, Naitasiri.

For the first time ever Government has launched a National Soil Health Card that will allow farmers to better plan the kind of crops they wish to plant on their land, says Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

“Unlike blindly applying general fertilizer, when you have a soil health card then you can determine what nutrient or micro-nutrient needs to be addressed,” he said.

Dr. Reddy launched the National Soil Health Card in Muaniweni, Naitasiri on Thursday (27.8.20).

He said the card would equip farmers with the knowledge on the best techniques to utilize on their farms.

“It will improve and allow farmers to make decisions about how to undertake farming activities.

“It will allow the Ministry of Agriculture

to fine tune applications of organic fertilisers to deal with those nutrients that might be deficit in your farms and therefore will allow you to achieve faster efficiency.”

He said it was of vital importance that soil fertility tests were undertaken regularly so farmers’ would know what the status of their farm soil was.

“Now, it is something that we, the current generation of farmers must accept, must acknowledge and then take remedial step to improve so that in the future, your children; the next generation of farmers, will continue to have quality land and soil.

“It is your interest, it is in the interest of your community and it is a national interest that you must continuously undertake sustainable agricultural practices that will ensure that soil fertility is maintained, if not enhanced over time,” the Minister said.

The Minister said soil fertility was a dynamic matter and therefore, farmers’ moral and ethical responsibilities were to undertake cropping practices that would leave the land if possible, with a more enhanced soil fertility status.

Dr. Reddy said in the last decade there was a noticeable decline in the overall soil fertility status in Fiji, which was found after quite a number of research projects were conducted.

“It is a natural phenomenon that if you continuously farm a particular area and simultaneously don’t engage in activities that will replenish the nutrients that’s taken out by agricultural activity, then soil fertility and quality will continue to decline.

## KNOW YOUR WORTH AS A WOMAN – ARADHANA SHARES HER EXPERIENCE



Mrs. Aradhana Deesh sharing her experience with HR Officials at HQ.

Female officers of the Human Resources & Information Division of the Ministry of Agriculture were reminded of their importance

and received an empowering message emphasizing their place as women in agriculture and within the workforce.

While addressing staff of the HR&I Division, Research Officer Aradhana Deesh shared her experiences from her 3-week Leadership program for Women in Agriculture Research held in Australia earlier this year.

“The Meryl Williams Fellowship

leadership program is funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and was attended by 20 ladies from 6

countries in the Asia-Pacific region,” she said.

“I was privileged to be a part of it and I would like to motivate you to know your worth and your role as a woman in the agriculture sector,” said Aradhana.

The importance of self-care was highlighted as an aspect that could boost their daily output; “Some of us are so absorbed in our work and family that we forget to take good care of ourselves,” she said.

Highlighting the importance of the role women play in the workforce, Aradhana challenged the women participants to go beyond their expectations and to soar the skies like eagles.

“This does not only apply to women who are practically engaged in farming, you as Human Resources officers are a part of it, you are accountable for the welfare of the officers in the Ministry,” she said.

“Keep in mind that regardless of what post or salary band you fall under, your work output matters, you are the reason why officers



smile every day and your contribution, co-operation and team work is important,” she said.

“Take a bold step, take a challenge and have positive vibes always, manage your stress, never look down on yourself, enjoy yourself and deliver your best.”

Aradhana reminded her HR colleagues to know who they were and the importance of their work in the Ministry.

“There are always challenges in the work place, there’s no two ways about that, there are crucial situations that you will have to come across and you will have to find a way to tackle problems that you face so it does not affect

your performance,” she said.

“We are women and we are known to be the wings and feet of development, we need to see ourselves in a different way, know your worth and know that you can be leaders and not to be behind every successful man all the time,” she said.

“This does not mean that you will have to over-rule leadership but merely working in a team, recognizing your contribution as a woman, your dedication, and loyalty, encouraging others and changing your views for the betterment of your section, division, Ministry and family.”

Clerical Officer (PPU) Lavenia Baravilala

said the message shared by Ms Deesh had been educational and inspiring.

“Most of the things we learnt have been inspirational and we know women are often not valued most of the time and it is inspiring to know that we can create a difference not only in our families but our workplaces as well and knowing our worth is important,” she said.

“I applaud all women working at the Human Resource section for always holding the fort and achieving all that is required and shouldering all the criticism that comes our way,” said Lavenia.

## NEED FOR MORE MUSHROOM FARMING REITERATED



*Participants of the Mushroom training at the JUNCAO training Centre in Legalega.*

The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the JUNCAO Technology team conducted the 34th training on mushroom farming at the JUNCAO training centre in Legalega, Nadi from 13-14 August 2020.

Forty-two participants sponsored by the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development (FRIEND) Fiji are part of the two-day training.

These participants include tour managers from the hotel industry that had recently been laid off work, organic farmers, and interested stakeholders.

Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass while addressing the participants via Zoom conference meeting this morning said there was a need for more farmers to venture into mushroom farming to increase production.

“Currently there are nine active producers in Fiji, six in the Central Division, and three in the Western Division selling fresh mushroom from \$12 to \$25 per kilogram,” said Mr. Dass.

Fiji imports 124 metric tonnes of mushroom worth \$0.9million annually. There is an existing demand for the commodity,

which is increasing in popularity in local markets, namely supermarkets, restaurants, and within the tourism sector.

“Most edible mushrooms sold in Fiji are imported as fresh, canned, and dried. Some mushroom varieties sold locally are Button, Enoki, Oyster, and Shitake while the two viable mushrooms growing successfully in Fiji are Grey Oyster and medicinal mushroom.”

Mushrooms are filled with beneficial nutrition which creates lots of opportunities for farmers to venture into; “Mushrooms are gradually getting recognition in the Fijian market as studies on mushroom consumption suggest a healthy immune system and lower chance of getting Non-Communicable Diseases thus creating a high demand for fresh mushrooms from health-conscious consumers,” said Mr. Dass.

The JUNCAO technology team has so far trained 1,500 local technicians with 33 training workshops conducted throughout the country. The trainees are provided with free mushroom tubers and JUNCAO cuttings to set up smallholder units.

Ms. Kelera Mataitka, 38yrs, an

Architecture Graduate said she was interested in learning about mushrooms as it complemented the knowledge gained from her recently completed Master studies in Architecture in Japan.

“Part of my research was working with mycelium in trying to develop building products. I heard about this mushroom workshop, got in touch with Ministry of Agriculture, and here I am,” she said.

Ms. Mataitka said mushroom was easy to grow, highly nutritious, with a high market value.

Mr. Poasa Nauluvula, 54yrs, of Wailoko, Sabeto was a tour manager before COVID-19 hit the tourism industry. Attending the workshop was a chance for him to explore mushroom farming as an alternative source of income.

“I sincerely hope this training will help me. We have just tried mushroom cooking and it’s very tasty and very easy to cook.

“Mushrooms is also one of the ways we can be healthy. With obesity being one of the main problems in Fiji, I think eating mushrooms can cure obesity and stay young, I guess,” Mr Nauluvula said.

Mrs. Rajnesh Lata Charan, 52yrs, a Lautoka businesswoman thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for the training, adding, she was ready to begin with her mushroom farming.

“I was doing very well with my consultancy until COVID-19 hit. So I am definitely looking at multiple sources of income, and I saw this opportunity through FRIEND,” she said.

Mrs. Charan said with her extensive experience in the sugar industry together with her keen interest in farming and gardening, she realized that agriculture was the way forward for Fiji.

Since 2017, a total of 37,388 free mushroom substrate tubes were given to 113 farmers and stakeholders.

Tuber distribution is free from the JUNCAO Centre at Legalega and production figures for productive farmers indicates ranges from 300 to 500 tubers being produced per month.

# ONE OF FIJI'S BIGGEST NURSERY OPENS IN SABETO



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (4th from left) officially opens Naboutini Sabeto Nursery.

A nursery that has the capacity to house 360,000 seedlings from an initial investment of about \$70,000 was opened by the Hon. Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Dr. Mahendra Reddy in Sabeto on 14 August 2020.

"Today is another milestone achievement for the Sabeto farmer cluster in terms of establishing one of the largest nursery in this country.

"There are about 70,000 bongo chillies here. These farmers who will be taking these seedlings to grow on their farms, are contracted with Agro Marketing Authority," he said.

In commending the initiative, Dr Reddy said Government was strongly encouraging farmers to move towards becoming an agricultural entrepreneur.

"Put your entire intellect, entire resource, entire energy, on growing quality produce and making it ready for the market to be picked up. That's the model we are promoting," he said.

The Hon. Minister said in order for the agriculture sector to grow in Fiji, there was a need to grow the market.

"We want to bring market signal to the farmer, as we have done here with Agro Marketing Authority and also other exporters around the country, who are providing market signals to the farmer."

Dr. Reddy explained Government would continue to support the three commercial models of agriculture, which included all categories of farmers, whether they were large, medium, or small.

He said the first model was the business-minded entrepreneur who set themselves

up on their own, farm and then export their commodities. The second model, the Hon. Minister said, were those that established processing plants and contracted farmers to supply to them; these businesses process and then export. The third type, he said, were cluster farmers, such as the Sabeto initiative, where farmers focused on commercial farming on the same crops; learn from each other, were provided machinery to use in that cluster, trained in correct farming practices and methods to ensure they produced quality commodities for export via the Agriculture Marketing Authority.

He applauded the two men who made the nursery initiative a reality – Mr Liakat Ali and Mr Vinesh Rai, the Advisory Councillor of the area.

"We will need more Liakat Alis' and Vinesh Rais' in Fiji and if we get a dozen like them, the aspirations of our agriculture sector will be fully realized".

Mr Rai said 117 farmers formed the Sabeto cluster but the number would continue to grow.

"We're proud of what has been achieved so far. After three months of hard work, without any money, without any support – this is a big achievement for us, our farmers, all of Sabeto, and all other farmers who will soon join us," he said.

Mr. Rai encouraged farmers not to wait for government assistance.

"We didn't ask anyone to help us, we wanted to do this on our own. We know assistance will come later on, especially with COVID-19 and the problems that came with it.

"If people will continue to depend on government all the time, they will keep sitting and waiting for help. Instead of waiting, we did it on our own in three months; we did it, day and night.

"After seeing this, many people can do it in the village. It's not that it will affect our business but I want people to do it so more people can plant."

## RESEARCH DIVISION FOSTERS TEAM BUILDING SPIRIT BY PLANTING DURUKA

Staff of the Ministry's Research Division planted 0.25 hectares of duruka at Legalega Research Station (LRS) on 13 August 2020 as part of its team building exercise.

The 0.25 hectares of planted duruka at LRS will also serve as a duruka seed bank of planting material that will be made available to farmers to improve food and nutrition security, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Planting materials were sourced from

within the Legalega Research Station and was planted in a well-prepared field for peak planting material establishment.

Approximately 12,000 to 15,000 cuttings are expected to be produced from this 0.25 hectares of planted duruka.

This team-building exercise was jointly undertaken with the assistance from staff of the Ministry's Sigatoka Research Station in Nacocolevu.



Legalega Research staff planting the 0.25 hectares of duruka at the Station.



# MINISTRY ASSISTS RIDGE TO REEF PROJECT



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy at one of the Ridge to Reef model farm within the Ba catchment during the World Day to Combat Desertification.

Vunivia and Tunuloa catchments.

The Land Use section of the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with other Government agencies, civil society organizations and NGOs, stakeholders, private sectors, resource owners, and local groups, University of the South Pacific and Pacific Community (SPC) is currently implementing this

Communities living within priority water catchments on the two main islands of Fiji have found a solution to challenges they face such as flooding, upstream sedimentation, poaching, and sand mining through the Ridge to Reef project.

Aimed at improving the livelihoods, watershed management, and opportunities through local actions to conserve and rehabilitate their environments, the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project areas include the Waidina, Ba, Tuva, Labasa,

project.

Senior Research Officer (Land Use Planning) of the Ministry of Agriculture Solomon Nagaunavou said the Ridge to Reef project is targeted at preserving the biodiversity and ecosystem services of communities.

“The Ministry of Agriculture has a role to play in this project and the Land Use section is working in partnership with these other agencies to preserve biodiversity, provide ecosystem services, sequester carbon, improve

climate resilience, reduce poverty and sustain livelihoods,” he said.

The Land Use Planning Section of the Ministry of Agriculture under this project plays a pivotal role in the six identified catchments through land use planning, hands-on community awareness, and advocating on adaptable low-cost agroforestry systems.

“This includes driving change in practices and behavior of farmers towards more sustainable practices, especially soil conservation; and more resilient farming system,” said Mr. Nagaunavou.

“Equally critical is the extension role with farmers in the respective project catchments, the Ministry is to ensure better soil conservation farming practices, notably on sloping land and to develop its work in a holistic and participatory approach.

“Together with the Ministry of Forestry, we have identified and mapped the highest priority sites for reforestation and restoration, including zones subject to regular flooding and areas prone to soil erosion,” he said.

“Also, we’ve identified sites for on-farm integrated landscape management practices and held consultations with farmers and the communities and have led the development of community land use plans based on the area’s land-use capability,” said Mr. Nagaunavou.

## MINISTRY ADVOCATES FOOD SECURITY TO YOUTHS



Youths from Central and Eastern Division planting dalo for food security.

Securing the nation’s food security now and for the future requires the engagement of our youth.

This was shared to youth during the recent International Youth Day celebrations at Nausori Village with youth engagement and development remaining a key priority of the Fijian Government.

In aligning with this year’s theme “Youth Engagement for Global Action” and the

sub-theme of the Central/Eastern Division celebrations - “Food Security”, the Ministry of Agriculture provided hands-on training on best agriculture practices to attending youths.

Additionally, the Ministry provided planting materials of resilient crops to youth groups during the celebration as part of its contributions.

“The Ministry provided 500 cassava cuttings, 500 dalo toppings and dried vegetable

seedlings which will assist the youths engage more effectively in socio-economic activities that will develop their potential,” said Senior Agriculture Officer Naitasiri Mr. Apenisa Rarasea.

“As for the planting materials, our officers will be with the youths and youth groups and be part of the hands-on training and will be distributed amongst the youth groups.”



Participating youth Manasa Cakaunitabua said he was grateful that youth were remembered as engines of change around the globe.

“In recognizing the potential of youth, that we can create impactful and productive decisions for our livelihoods despite the numerous challenges we are facing today, for that I would like to thank the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ministry of Agriculture,” he said.

“Learning to plant for food security is a bonus as we have resources that we can make use of and to develop what we are capable of to realize our true value as young people of Fiji,”

said Manasa.

Meanwhile, the youths of the Central/Eastern division were encouraged to take an organized approach considering the impacts of the current pandemic in terms of food security.

This was the message shared by Minister for Youth and Sports Hon. Parveen Bala while officiating at the celebrations earlier this week.

“For the Fijian Government, not only the engagement but the development of our youth has been a priority.

“Fiji is experiencing the effects of climate change, including worsening coastal erosion and floods, this sure has the impact on food

security, unless action is taken climate change will drastically affect our food security,” he said.

“Therefore the event will provide the much needed awareness to ensure we develop youths who are knowledgeable, proactive and resilient to the undeniably unprecedented changes that we are experiencing.”

“Be the positive role models while being active and responsible citizens in taking care of yourselves, your families and also giving back to your communities for a food secure Fiji,” said Minister Bala.

## PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT IN AGRICULTURE IS KEY: DR. REDDY

Government will soon launch candies made from pawpaw and pineapple, revealed Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

“Our agriculture research station, under the guidance of the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Mr. Ritesh Dass, has developed two new products. Candies made from pineapple and pawpaw.”

He said farmers would now not have to worry about flooding the market with pineapple and pawpaw because Agriculture Marketing Authority would buy it all.

The Minister said at the moment local supermarkets were selling dried fruits and dried candies manufactured abroad, but that would change as the country would now have the capacity to produce its own as part of product development by his Ministry.

“In this way, we can grow the market if we create new products. If you don't create new products, if you continue to push commodities, the market will be flooded,” he said.

Dr. Reddy said the issues of perishability and flooding the market in the agriculture sector were some challenges Government was vigorously working on addressing through product development in the Ministry of Agriculture.

He said a significant amount of work in his Ministry was now dedicated to product development.

“We are very mindful when you have agriculture expanding at a commercial level, we do not want the market to be flooded. For that, we have to make a transition, from commodity to product.

“Commodities can be directly consumed.

“There is a limit to the size of commodities that can be consumed. There is a limit to how much dalo or cassava can be consumed.

“Beyond that, what will we do with the extra commodity? We have to convert it to product through processing, value adding etc,” he said.



*Food Product at the Koronivia Food Chemistry Laboratory.*

Dr. Reddy said an example of product development from commodity to product was converting bongo chillies to chilli sauce, or cassava to cassava fries that franchises like McDonald's or Burger King could utilize.

“One of the problems of agriculture commodities is its perishable nature. We cannot keep it for long.

“However, if you value add it and process it – we can increase the shelf life. Perishability will not be an issue.”

Another aspect of product development, he added, was attracting new consumers.

“If you create cassava fries then you can target consumers who are eating potatoes fries.

“Who would want to consume cassava fries? Cassava fries will be much better, much

healthier, and much cheaper than potato fries,” the Minister said.

He said another area Fiji was targeting to ensure sustainability of its product development was to break into the major supermarkets in Australia and New Zealand.

“We need to develop products out of these commodities and sell it out of Woolworths and Coles; they are the mainstream supermarkets, where every Australian and New Zealanders are buying from.

“That's the market we should target.

“We cannot limit ourselves from selling in these Fiji shops, Samoan shops in Australia and New Zealand. That's not a full market.

“In doing so, ordinary New Zealanders and Australians will come and buy our cassava fries, chillie sauce etc.”



# M&E SYSTEM WILL ENSURE EFFICIENT USE OF RESOURCES: PSA



Senior management of the Ministry listen attentively during the M&E Workshop.

The Ministry has implemented a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system that would allow it to check if the programs under its care 'are on track, sufficient and adequate,' says the Permanent Secretary of Agriculture, Mr Ritesh Dass.

He expressed these sentiments while opening the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Ministry's Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Workshop at Holiday Inn on 11 August 2020.

The Ministry's Heads of Divisions and other senior management were informed that M&E exercises formed the basis of interventions and assessed the quality of activities conducted.

"It helps with identifying the most valuable and efficient use of resources and assist the Ministry with information on

necessary interventions and remedial actions that needs to be undertaken," PSA said.

He said the workshop could not have been organized at a better time given the start of the new Financial Year 2020/2021; a time when all internal Government planning documents such as COP (Costed Operational Plan), Business Plans and Individual Work Plans were compiled.

"It is imperative that we organize such forum within our organization to improve our understanding on the importance of monitoring and evaluation in our planning process," he said.

A key objective of the workshop, Mr Dass said, was to enlighten the staff of the implementing Divisions on key challenges and issues faced during previous monitoring and evaluation exercises to allow for a more harmonized and consistent system in place.

The PSA acknowledged the continuous technical support of FAO to the Ministry that allowed the compilation of the COP Monitoring Report for the first nine months of the last financial year.

PAO Livestock, Mr Avinesh Dayal said it appeared there was a need to align the Ministry's COP to Strategic Development Priorities or SDPs to enable M&E to become clearer.

Mr. Dayal said it would be easier to understand the documents at all levels of the Ministry and implementation together with M&E becomes well aligned.

"Overall, I think the workshop was a good way to identify gaps and challenges and to see how we can move forward taking into consideration some of the recommendations made by the groups."

## NEW APPOINTEE FROM JULY 2020

No.	Name	Post	Station	Status
1.	Brenda Ragi	Principal Information Officer (Information & Communication)	Headquarters - Information Section - Human Resource & Information	New Intake
2.	Adi Susana Siganisucu Tuivuya	Principal Economic Planning Officer (Agriculture Trade)	Headquarters - Economic Planning & Statistics	New Intake
3.	Eroni Namata	Agricultural Assistant (Keyasi)	Lawaqa Agriculture Office - Crop Extension	New Intake
4.	Samisoni Cama Ledua	Agricultural Assistant (Ba)	Ba Agricultural Office	New Intake
5.	William Ligabalavu	Senior Technical Assistant (Plant Protection-Plant Pathology)	Koronivia Research Station - Crop Research	New Intake
6.	Jone Masaki Livani	Labourer (Horticulture) Koronivia	Koronivia Research Station - Crop Research	New Intake
7.	Isei Matakicakau	Labourer (Lautoka)	Lautoka Agriculture Office - Crop Extension	New Intake



# PHOTO GALLERY



Staff of the Northern division during the Rice Field Day.



Research team inside the Wailotua 1 with Bat Manure.



Extension staff delivering the FSP Project materials to a vegetable farmer in Navua.



BTEC team in Wainibuka conducting TB testing.



Senior Veterinary Officer Dr. Beato Lenoa (right) conducting eye enucleation surgery on a cattle in Rakiraki



FICAC conducts awareness training at HR



HQ staff packing seeds for the 2nd phase of distribution



Ministry farewells Fiji Agricultural Partnership Project (FAPP) Unit.