

# AGRICULTURE Newsletter



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Inside view of the Mobile Soil Testing Caravan

## Mobile Soil Testing Caravan Launched

*PRO Chemistry - Mr. Ami Chand Sharma (right), briefs the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the launching of the Mobile Soil Testing Caravan at Bilalevu, Sigatoka.*

A mobile soil testing caravan was launched by the Ministry of Agriculture to bring soil testing facilities closer to the farmers' doorstep.

The mobile soil testing caravan will be able to deliver services such as soil sampling, testing of pH, EC, Nitrogen, Phosphorous, and Potassium, and also provides an instant analytical report which can then be issued to farmers advising them of their soil health status while also providing recommendations on the dosages of fertilizers needed and the necessary soil amendments required to correct soil fertility.

While launching the mobile laboratory in Bilalevu, Sigatoka on 23 June, the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said this was made to decentralize the soil testing exercise and make it readily accessible to all farmers nationwide.

"In this agricultural equation, technology is key. Without technology, without investment in technology, we will not be able to push the production frontier, there is a limit to the extent

to which we can push productivity increases via basic simple changes in the farm," said Minister Reddy.

"Beyond that limit, we need to introduce new technologies to enhance our efforts in addressing the fundamental binding constraints in the agriculture sector, and one of the fundamental binding constraints in agriculture is soil quality and soil fertility.

"We are here to launch a very important innovation of technology that is brought right to the farmers' field, no longer will you need to travel to Sigatoka taking your soil samples with you, no longer will you need to submit your soil sample and then receive feedback that your soil sample has been lost, no longer will you have to talk to the testers, the analysts and discuss remotely the results of your soil testing," he said.

"The soil testing will be done on your farm immediately with samples taken immediately and results given back to the farmers there and then. We now have the pleasure to launch

a mobile soil testing vehicle which will be accessible to farmers any time they want," Hon. Reddy said.

He has also reiterated to commercial and semi-commercial farmers to take advantage of the mobile testing laboratory to ensure that they planted the suitable crops on the piece of land they were farming on to maximize their production levels and yields.

"It gives you the opportunity to plan how you are going to adjust the fertility of your soil because you now know what the fertility composition of your soil is, what the nutrient composition of your soil is and that is critical for you to know in order to grow or adjust according to the results.

"Without having quality soil, you can't grow crops with that particular yield, your productivity will be affected, your production will be affected and the quality of your produce will be affected," said Minister Reddy.

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## Fiji Commemorates World Day to Combat Land Desertification, Degradation and Drought



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Senior Agriculture Officials and Executive Management of Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute (NATI) during the commemoration of World Day to Combat Desertification, Degradation and Drought at NATI.

Fiji as a member country of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) joined the rest of the world in commemorating World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought on 17 June 2022 at the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute, Navuso, Naitasiri.

While officiating during the commemorative event, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy highlighted that the Fijian Government remained committed to promoting the safe and sustainable use of farming practices to prevent land degradation and desertification.

“With modern technology and competing land uses, agriculture farming is being forced into steep marginal areas in Fiji. We know that the impact of bad agricultural practices on slope land affects the surrounding farming areas including soil health which subsequently leads to a low productivity rate.

“The way forward for us as agricultural enthusiasts is through the adoption of Sustainable Landscape Approach where we can incorporate practices to manage our soil health, maintain fertility, minimize land degradation and at the same time maximize our productivity,” said Minister Reddy.

“Holistic approaches are needed to reverse these trends because as a small island state, the effects of climate change will only be aggravated if we fail to implement land-based climate change mitigation activities that can support conservation goals effectively and the measures we take matter if we’re to secure our food and nutrition,” said Minister Reddy.

The Ministry in collaboration with relevant stakeholders continues to raise community awareness among all land users on the importance of protecting, preserving and managing our land resources for better ecosystem services that support, provide

and protect our livelihoods with its pristine environment and biodiversity.

This commitment is articulated in Strategic Priority 3 of the Ministry of Agriculture Costed Operation plan 2021-2022 specifically indicating the need to improve the adoption of sustainable resource management and climate-smart agriculture. This is also a vehicle to address Strategic Priority 1 – on Food and Nutrition Security, Strategic Priority 2 – Increase farmer’s household income consequently, expanding production level to commercial agriculture in a more sustainable and responsible manner.

“Action can be taken at all levels, from citizens, businesses, governments, non-government organizations, private partners and academia, everyone can come on board and lend a helping hand to rise up from drought together,” said Hon. Reddy.

The Desertification and Drought Day is a catalyst for action to be continued throughout the year. The Ministry for Agriculture is calling upon all of us to act together to educate all land users on good agriculture practices to sustain soil for secured quality food and a resilient Fiji and practices to adopt to decrease the impact of drought.

Meanwhile, a demonstration of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) Farming, a project by the Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute was launched as part of the celebrations.

This day has been observed since 1995 to promote public awareness relating to international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought.

## Women of Ba Encouraged To Take Up Floriculture as a Business

Participants of a three-day flower arrangement training organized by the Ministry of Agriculture were encouraged to continue on from the training and to actively participate in floriculture.

This was imparted to the 77 women who were part of the floriculture training in Nailaga, Ba by the Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay during the closing of the training which aimed to

impart skills to participants to assist them in improving their livelihoods.

“Some participants see floriculture as part of their socially obligated role along







Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay with the participants of the flower arrangement training in Nailaga village, Ba

with home beautification but if nurtured well, floriculture will provide a reliable source of employment to support families and communities with a stable source of income,” he said.

Women are obligated to arrange flowers for church services and other occasions such as weddings, burials and small community and family occasions and this training under the floriculture program of the Ministry empowers women to fully develop their potential.

The three-day training has equipped the women of Ba with basic flower arrangement knowledge, understanding of the factors

affecting the design and understanding of basic floral designs. “There aren’t enough employment opportunities for women in the rural sector however your participation in this floriculture training will unleash your potential and help support your potential for floral arrangements or help you become décor entrepreneurs,” said Hon Pillay.

The 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census (FAC) recorded a total of 11,971 females engaged in either Crop or Livestock farming as their primary or secondary occupation.

Moreover, the women participants were challenged to utilize assistance by

the Ministry of Agriculture for women to expand their agricultural activities, particularly if they were interested in floriculture.

The Ministry of Agriculture has assisted more than 6,000 women under the “Women in Agriculture” programme from 2006 to 2021.

The assistance provided has been in terms of training, provision of planting materials, infrastructure and small farming equipment.

In addition, the Ministry is currently working towards implementing its recently launched Agriculture Gender Policy in the agriculture subsectors to provide access to agriculture services and goods to women to reduce inequality in the agriculture sector.

Ba participant Tarusila Nainoca who arranges for the church said she is grateful that a training to develop the potential of women was held and the skills she has acquired will allow her to better her arrangement in social functions.

Rita Devi from Lautoka whose hobby is floriculture said it will now benefit her as she will do flower arrangements for both her hobby and business.

The Ministry of Agriculture in the 2021/2022 financial year had allocated \$200,000.00 to assist women entrepreneurs to start or expand their cottage industries.

## Gender Transformative Planning And Budgeting Training

The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation conducted a three day GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE PLANNING AND BUDGETING training to members from Gender Mainstreaming Action Group and Officers from the Ministry of Economy, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry at the Grand Pacific Hotel. The training is set to strengthen capacity, knowledge and skill on Transformative Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Responsive Budgeting and Planning and to improve effective coordination and accountability for gender equality outcomes across government institutions and agencies.



Participants at the Gender Transformative Planning and Budgeting Training



# Food Safety Imperative for All



Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Vinesh Kumar with Head of Agriculture Research Mr. Shalendra Prasad at the NFNC booth during the World Food Safety Day celebrations

Access to sufficient amounts of safe food is key to sustaining life and promoting good health.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while delivering his statement on the World Food Safety Day celebration.

World Food Safety Day Celebration with the theme “Safer Food, Better Health” was celebrated on Tuesday 7th June 2022 throughout the globe to create awareness and ensure that each citizen is well informed about ways to reduce the risk of food poisoning.

“Whenever we talk about Food Safety and Safe Consumption, we need to ensure that from the farm gate to the consumers’ table, the food is safe to consume and safe to handle as well,” said Minister Reddy.

Minister Reddy said with an estimated 600 million cases of foodborne illnesses annually, unsafe food was a threat to human health and economies, disproportionately affecting vulnerable and marginalised people, especially women and children.

Minister Reddy added that an estimated 420,000 people

around the world die every year after eating contaminated food and children under five years of age carried 40 percent of the foodborne disease burden.

“Food safety is everyone’s business; it includes farmers, those who handle post-harvest processes of the produce, middleman, exporters, retailers, processors and at the end, its consumers as well, our people at home who handle food, chefs who prepare food and people who serve - we need to mobilise everyone to ensure that people who consume food are consuming safe food; therefore, it is very important to comply to global food standards - standards set up in national level and the global level,” said Minister Reddy.

Minister Reddy added that it was equally important that an effective regulatory food control system be established that included emergency preparedness and response, provided access to clean wa-

ter, and promoted the application of good agricultural practices. “My concern is during abnormal times that is riskier to our people, particularly the unfortunate who had been affected by the natural disaster; the vulnerable could resort to consuming unsafe food; how do we deal with those kinds of circumstances, what should our response be? Some people are distributing rations, distributing food materials which we have no control of in terms of food standards.”

Minister Reddy added that there were people who were suffering and were hungry for food, who had lost everything and would not be as receptive to the food standards as they weren’t in a position to willingly adhere to said standards. “How do we handle those types of situations? We need to be practical about it,” Hon. Reddy said.

Moreover, Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Vinesh Kumar while officially opening the World Food Safety Day celebrations said that at the Ministry, food and nutrition security was the basis of its first Strategic priority which was one of the five key pillars of its 5-year Strategic Development Plan that guided its daily operations.

PS Kumar said through this priority, the Ministry ensured improved production and access to local food, demand for diverse, nutritious and safe food; increased production of resilient, safe and nutritious food in rural and urban communities; and a strong multi-sector approach supported by a Food and Nutrition Security Policy which was in its final drafting stages.





# Improved Project Submissions Critical For Agriculture Development

The Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the European Union and PROMAN Consultants organized a workshop for officers on the importance of formulating the Projects for Development Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture.

The Improving Quality of Project Submissions within the Ministry of Agriculture workshop is a Technical Assistance by PROMAN Consultants through the Sustainable Rural Livelihood programme funded by the EU.

While opening the week-long workshop at Suvavou House, Acting Chief Economist Sera Bose said projects are a means of implementing policy and strategy and were an indicator of result-based project designs and monitoring which were vital

aspects for any sector, particularly for agriculture development.

“It is the means by which our Ministries and Divisions intervene in a strategic way to address development priorities, especially challenges and opportunities that exist in the sector,” she said.

“Projects are means to adjust development focus and re-directing resources in response to changes in the environment due to climate change, changes in external market conditions or changing taste and preference in the local population.

“Reassuring that the quality of projects designed and implemented will have an impact on the quality of the Ministry’s intervention and strategic planning frame-

work,” said Ms Bose. She also reiterated the importance of the workshop stating that improving the quality of projects formulated to achieve the maximum output in the sector was critical to its overall performance in the country’s economic landscape.

“Organizing and coordinating such workshop is important to raise our performance internally as a Ministry and externally in increasing the competitiveness of our sector and at the same time, improving the livelihoods of our stakeholders,” said Ms Bose.

The workshop is envisaged to ensure the improvement in strategies to design robust and appropriate



*Acting Chief Economist Sera Bose (2nd from right) with the organisers and participants of the workshop*



*Clicks from the group discussions during the workshop*



## NEW APPOINTMENTS



**Alumecei Vadru Somumu**  
Field Assistant (Administration)  
Koronivia,  
Crop Research



**Nitin Nitesh Kumar**  
Driver (Seaqaqa)  
Crop Research



**Ajay Akash Sharma**  
Field Assistant (SRS)  
AH&P



**Epeli Ratukana**  
Labourer (Dobulevu Research Station)  
Crop Research



**Aptar Singh**  
Driver  
Research Station  
Koronivia



**Shivneel Kumar**  
Assistant Programmer (IT)  
Headquarters,  
HRD&S



**Viliame Bulimaibau**  
Agricultural Technical Officer  
(MI - Nasinu) AH&P



**Sainimere Vosare**  
Labourer (Seaqaqa) Northern,  
Crop Extension



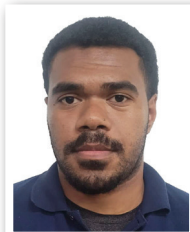
**Moreen Lata Devi**  
Agricultural Assistant (Nausori/Nuku)  
Crop Extension



**Binesh Prasad**  
Senior Research Officer  
(Agronomy-Root Crops) Koronivia,  
Crop Research



**Summet Narayan**  
Agricultural Assistant (Nausori)  
AH&P



**Waisale Soqo**  
Labourer (Raiwaqa) Headquarters,  
Crop Extension



**Ratu Filimoni Balekisuva Loco**  
Field Assistant (Korovou/Tailevu)  
Crop Extension



**Semi Veikoso**  
Labourer (Seaqaqa) Northern,  
Crop Extension





# PHOTO GALLERY



*World Food Safety Day celebrations at MoA Hq, Raiwaqa*



*Staff of Central Division during a staff meeting with Regional Manager Central*



*Soil Sampling by PRO Chemistry Mr. Ami Chand*



*Young farmers from in and within the greater Tailevu North area during the workshop on revising the draft National Sub Policy on Youth in Agriculture*



*Public Consultations on Noqu Agriculture*



*Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Vinesh Kumar with student participants of the oratory contest during the World Food Safety Day celebrations*



*MoA Officials outside the Mobile Soil Testing Laboratory in Bilalevu, Sigatoka*