



Agriculture NEWSLETTER



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2020 FIJI AGRICULTURE CENSUS REPORT RELEASED



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment-Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (middle), PS Agriculture-Mr. Ritesh Dass and Chief Economist-Ms. Sera Bose during the launch of the Fiji Agriculture Census Reports at Raiwaqa MoA Conference Room.

The 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census Report was officially released on 8 July by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Minister Reddy said it had been an endeavour for the Ministry of Agriculture to attempt to consolidate these important statistics while ensuring that the best possible set of information that highlighted Fiji's Agriculture Sector structure at a certain point in time was presented holistically and without fault.

"The Census of Agriculture is one of the key pillars of any national statistical system and in many developing countries; it is often the only means of producing statistical information on the structure and other relevant aspects of the agriculture sector.

"Furthermore, the Census data and report is also a proxy for a snapshot of rural growth and development," said Hon. Reddy.

"Moreover, it is the only data collection instrument that produces Statistical information on farms at the lowest geographical level such as farm holdings, households etc., therefore it is an essential source of information for government and decision-makers," he added.

Minister Reddy also highlighted that with the increased interest from different interest groups, individuals, households, corporate sectors, food processors, and external interest groups to invest in agriculture, the onus was on the Ministry of Agriculture, in particular, to provide them with different statistics for them to better understand the sector and reach informed decisions. "Agriculture Census enables compilation of data at community-level and ensures that issues affecting farmers, farm communities and agricultural operations are included when decisions are made on matters that affect them and their livelihood," said Hon. Reddy.

The objective of the 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census is to improve the quality of evidence-based policymaking, guide the development of Agricultural Statistics in Fiji and address unprecedented data demand to monitor national targets and Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2020 FAC reports are being released in four volumes of publications. Volume I – 2020 FAC General Tables and Descriptive Analysis. Volume

II - 2020 FAC Detailed Analysis and report of Enumeration areas. Volume III – 2020 FAC Gender Report. Volume IV – 2020 FAC Administration Report.

Volume I: General Tables and Descriptive Analysis presents 118 tables on detailed findings of the 2020 FAC. Each table highlights disaggregated numbers of key demographic indicators of farming households in Fiji's Agriculture Sector. Each indicator is also represented with graphical analysis linked to each table reported.

"During the 2020 Census period, we had a total number of 70,991 farming households with 11.9% of these being female-headed. The total population of these households were 300,861. Given that some households consisted of more than one farmer, the total number of farmers in Fiji, then, was 83,395," elaborated Minister Reddy.

Volume II provides a detailed agricultural activity by Geographical area. The Report of Enumeration Area presents district level information on Fiji's Agriculture Sector. This is very useful data, especially after a natural disaster, when damage assessments and estimates are warranted and much needed. This information will also be used for Agriculture Extension services.

"For the first time, we have undertaken a detailed analysis of agricultural activity by gender which is presented in Volume III. It culminates from the consensus that Gender needs to be included across sectoral policy as outlined in SDG 5, NDP and MoA SDP," he said.

Volume IV Administration Report, the report highlights a series of activities undertaken in the 2020 FAC highlighting systems and processes that guided the whole operation. The report also recommends methodologies and processes that should guide future agriculture data collection systems.

Minister Reddy also acknowledged the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the relevant Government authorities that led to the success of the 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census.

The 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census can be accessed from the Ministry of Agriculture's website on www.agriculture.gov.fj

BACK TO RURAL AGRICULTURE (B2RA) PROGRAMME LAUNCHED



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the launch of the Back To Rural Agriculture Programme

Fijians, whose livelihoods were impacted by COVID-19 through loss of employment and have opted to return to their villages to take up farming are set to benefit from a newly launched agriculture program.

The program, 'Back To Rural Agriculture' (B2RA), was announced by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy on 28 June, will target 330 individuals who have since taken up crop and vegetable farming following their recent unemployment status.

"I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Agriculture is launching the "Back to Rural Agriculture" (B2RA) program. This program aims to support Fijians who have lost their jobs due to the current pandemic and are now returning to the rural area to focus on agriculture.

"To reinforce their settlement support and to develop the agricultural entrepreneurship of these individuals, the Ministry of Agriculture will commence by providing them an initial farm support kit, which will help them commence their farming activity," said Hon.

Reddy.

The program is set out as a targeted intervention, with a long-term development aim to see the increase in rural vitality via continued co-operation between these returnee farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture and rural communities.

"As a startup, the program will include a total package of \$400.00 per individual, which would consist of \$250 worth of farming tools, directly delivered to the successful farmer, \$100 worth of planting materials and \$50.00 cash, which can be used to procure any other items needed," said Minister Reddy.

The toolkit will include 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 cloths.

Planting materials will also be distributed in addition to the above equipment, based on individual requirements and land suitability.

Minister Reddy emphasized that the programme was tailored for those who wanted to venture into agriculture after having lost

their jobs due to the current pandemic, stressing that it would only be provided to those meeting the criteria in full.

To apply for the program, interested individuals will be expected to provide the following information to substantiate the selection:

- Evidence of loss of job due to COVID-19 (letter from the company, etc.) and no other alternative sources of income for the family;
- Applicant should have land readily available, at least 5 acres with supporting documents;
- Applicant must be an aspiring crop farmer with the intention to take on full-time farming as a core activity, and;
- If the farm is located in a rural village setting, a supporting letter from the community leader is to be provided.

The first phase of this program started on 1st July, 2021.

INVESTING IN HEALTHY LAND IS A SMART ECONOMIC DECISION: DR. REDDY



Ministry staff planting trees to commemorate the 'Desertification and Drought Day 2021'

Investing in healthy land is a smart economic decision that drives action to protect and restore the natural ecosystem, which is the goal of the 2021 Desertification and Drought Day, says Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

He commented while commemorating 'Desertification and Drought Day 2021' at the Ministry of Agriculture Headquarters in Raiwaqa on 18 June.

Minister Reddy explained the activities the Ministry of Agriculture was undertaking to restore degraded land.

"The Ministry through its Sustainable Land Management activities, focuses on addressing land degradation for rural villages and settlements, ensure that changes in land use have limited effect on the extinction of native species and Green House Gas Emission."

Minister Reddy said the Ministry also

focused on other challenges such as; ongoing local land competition where agriculture prime land was used for other purposes, forcing farmers to move to marginal land which led to increased unsustainable and intensive land practices.

"With a commitment to restore and recover land, the Ministry continues to improve Research and Development on Soil health and promote the use of Mucuna bean, vetiver system technology, Agroforestry farming and evaluation of resistant crop and vegetable varieties.

"Enhanced technical advisory services on good land and animal husbandry practices that strengthen Land-Based restoration," Dr Reddy explained.

He said the Ministry of Agriculture would continue to support the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration that would provide

entrepreneurial youths working in ecosystem restoration with tools that would enable them to succeed.

"Through this program, the Ministry supports the Navuso Agriculture Technical Institute on training to become good land users. Engage with relevant Ministries, NGOs and private partners in enforcing restoration of degraded land in Fiji."

Hon. Reddy said the Ministry was also part of the National Ridge to Reef project, working closely with the Ministry of Forestry, the Pacific Community (SPC), and Conservation International in creating awareness, establishing demonstration plots, orchard planting and identifying degraded land for restoration to six target catchment areas – Waidina/Rewa, Ba, Tuva in Viti Levu and Tunuloa, Labasa catchment in Vanua Levu.

MINISTER REDDY ADDRESSES THE 42ND SESSION OF FAO CONFERENCE ON REVIEW OF STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE



Minister Reddy Addresses the 42nd Session of FAO Conference on Review of State of Food and Agriculture

The Fijian Government is looking at other alternatives and the best way forward to build a more sustainable and resilient food system in light of the current pandemic and climate-related shocks.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while presenting Fiji's statement during the virtual 42nd Session of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Conference on the Review of State of Food and Agriculture: Agriculture Food Systems, Transformation from Strategy to Action on 17 June.

"In response to COVID 19, Fiji through the Ministry of Agriculture has designed an Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan focusing on initiatives to support priorities of the Agriculture five year Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023)," said Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy said the plan included long term food and nutrition security through the distribution of seeds and seedlings to rural and urban communities, supporting commercial agriculture ventures through investment promotion, construction and upgrade of farm roads to create market access, and establishing nursery and orchards to ensure a sustainable and extensive seed bank.

"Progressively, the plan focuses on expanding agriculture to its full potential to raise national income and become the leading

export earner for the country and at the same time addresses key objectives of improving rural livelihoods.

He also elaborated on the series of policies and initiatives which were formulated to bolster agricultural output and growth. "These strategies realize Agriculture's aspiration to "Grow Beyond" targeting incremental growth and spearheading a paradigm shift in Agriculture.

"This was evident in the total gross volume and value of Agriculture Production of 2020 which increased by 5.6% and 2.9% respectively as compared to 2019. Fiji acknowledges the importance of a multi-sectoral approach which will ensure increased production, elimination of multi-dimensional vulnerabilities and mitigation of shocks."

Hon. Reddy said Fiji recognized that through FAO's partnership, design and implementation of comprehensive programs and coherent public policies, the achievement of the outcome of the "four betters" that will reflect an interconnected economic, social and environmental dimensions of Agri-food systems would be addressed.

"Fiji's food systems approach facilitates the identification of leverage points along the continuum from production to consumption," he said.

He further stressed that the approach also required that different sectors work together to push for transformations of different parts

of the food systems.

"As food security cannot only be addressed as an agricultural issue, obesity, overweight or anaemia cannot be seen as a mere health problem. As such, Fiji is vigorously pursuing the finalization of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security aimed at bringing together multi-sectorial players within the Government to prioritize and coordinate interventions that will ensure a sustainable and healthy food system," he said.

Minister Reddy accentuated the steps taken by Fiji via the organizing of national dialogues on the five Action Tracks of the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit scheduled for September 2021 stating that after these national dialogues, the participation of 580 interested participants was recorded from different sectors throughout the country such as Government officials, NGO's and Civil Society Organizations, external and bilateral partners, community leaders, academics, food processors and farmers.

Fiji has invested more than F\$300m through Annual Budget Allocation on Fiji's Agriculture sector, with the vision of establishing a Sustainable, Competitive and Resilient Agriculture Industry that will create an enabling environment for economic opportunities, climatic viability and food and nutrition security for all Fijians.

MINISTRY INUNDATED WITH APPLICATIONS FOR CASH FOR CULTIVATION INITIATIVE



Farmers lined up to register for the Cash for Cultivation program.

The Ministry of Agriculture received an overwhelming response from farmers applying to be part of the Cash for Cultivation initiative.

This was confirmed by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during a press conference on 14 June.

Minister Reddy said during this second phase of the Cash for Cultivation programme,

which was launched following the second wave of COVID-19 in Fiji, the targeted number of 3,000 farmers was exceeded shortly after the announcement was made.

“Now in the second phase of the Cash for Cultivation programme which was launched after the second round of COVID-19, and with thanks to the Government of Australia for the budget of FJ\$800,000 we are targeting 3,000 farming households.

“We have received 3,344 applications. Out of that, 1,805 has been processed and we are quickly looking at making the first tranche payment,” said Hon. Reddy.

“So at the moment, we have reached the target of 3,000 and we are not accepting any more expression of interest. In case we get additional funding, then we will open up for phase 3,” he added.

The verification process has so far been concluded for 1,805 of the applications received so far with 1,388 applications approved thus far and are set to receive their first tranche payment soon.

Minister Reddy said the geographical distribution of approved applications by division was 461 for the Western Division, 576 for the Central Division, 111 for the Northern Division and 240 for the Eastern Division.

“The numbers reflect the situation on the ground and we are very happy that the highest numbers are in the Central and Western Divisions so we look forward to processing their first tranche payments quickly so they can get on with the fieldwork (land preparation) and once they’ve completed it, we will provide the remainder of \$125.00.”

The Ministry is working with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to implement the programme with donor funding from the Government of Australia.

WESTERN FARMERS FIRST TO RECEIVE BACK TO RURAL AGRICULTURE FARM KITS

Ten farmers from the Western Division became the first recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture’s Back to Rural Agriculture (B2RA) programme, from the total of 370 that have been confirmed to receive the assistance.

Two farmers from Rakiraki, four from Tavua, two from Nadi and two from Sigatoka received the Back to Rural Agriculture farm support kits from the Ministry staff on 23 July 2021.

While officiating at the virtual handing over of the farm support kits, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the main objective of the program was to support Fijians who had lost their jobs due to the current pandemic and were now returning to the rural areas to focus on agriculture.

“We are handing over these kits to the ten pioneering recipients that were finalized after we went through a total of 8,147 applications,” said Dr Reddy.

He said from the total applications received, 4,273 were from the Central Division, 3631 from the West, 161 from Eastern, and 82 were from the Northern Division.

“As expected, close to 90per cent applications were from the Central and

Western Divisions that felt the full force of the pandemic,” the Minister said.

Dr Reddy said there was an overwhelming response for this particular package and it demonstrated that Fijians were now willing to go back to the rural areas and utilize the vacant land for agricultural expansion which was in line with the Ministry’s Strategic Plan to expand and utilise land to expand agriculture for commercial use.

“We are pleased to see that about 25per cent (1,886) of the applicants were female employees that had lost their jobs and were willing to resort to agriculture not only to support their livelihoods but in turn support the Ministry’s vision to expand agriculture.”

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the 10 farmers, Ms. Salanieta Marseu of Waqadra, Nadi thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for the support in helping farmers to be a part of the program.

The \$400-package includes \$250 worth of farm implements and equipment, \$50 cash and \$100 worth of planting materials. The farm materials and equipment includes a 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.

The Ministry will continue to hand over the farm support kits to the other 360 recipients in the coming weeks.



ATO Nadi Vinay Sami (right) with the B2RA farm support kit recipient Krishnil Sumeet Vikash of Navo, Nadi.

NORTHERN RICE FARMERS SET PRECEDENT



Rice harvesting in the North.

The Ministry of Agriculture's 'We Rice Up' programme has gathered momentum with farmers from the Northern Division setting the precedent.

This shift in focus to increasing rice yields and overall production was spurred on through the commitment and partnership between farmers, Ministry officials and key stakeholders to return Fiji's rice industry to its glory days.

With rice harvesting ongoing across the country, the Ministry of Agriculture had deployed its resources to expedite the entire harvesting process at a fraction of the cost to farmers, and in light of the demand for machinery through the operation of these public-owned rice harvesters, some farmers had their fields harvested at night.

In the province of Macuata alone, 337.08 hectares were put under rice cultivation from just 6 districts with a total of 674.87 metric tonnes of rice being produced altogether.

The Ministry of Agriculture, in turn, provided 652.1 hours to harvest this total rice yield from the 6 districts of Labasa, Wailevu,

Dreketi, Sasa, Mali and Nadogo.

For Suren Prasad of Coqeloa in Labasa who was able to harvest 0.6 metric tonnes of rice, the provision of the rice harvester at his farm showed the dedication by the Ministry to the farmers; "I was happy to receive them that evening and they worked hard to harvest all of my rice at that time, and during curfew, I am very happy and thankful to the Ministry for the assistance," he said.

Echoing similar sentiments, 52-year old Daven Sami of Nagigi lauded the efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture officials for committing to the farmers' needs.

"I planted a lot of rice because my cane got damaged and I opted to take up rice farming. The rice harvester was very good and I thank the Ministry because they came at the right time. After all, my rice had been over matured and I was worried that it could have gotten damaged again if there was any flash flooding because this place is low-lying," said Mr Sami.

"I believe the subsidized cost of hiring the rice harvesters is a big help to us farmers, I

would usually pay more than \$1,000 for labour costs to harvest my rice but for this assistance by the Ministry, it only cost probably \$150-\$200," he added.

Mr. Sami's 6-acre rice farm was harvested on the evening of Sunday 30th May whereby he managed to seal and pack 180 bags of rice paddy, approximately 4 metric tonnes worth, to be sold to Fiji Rice.

Meanwhile for 70-year-old Rup Narayan of Waigele whose rice was harvested on the evening of 9th June praised the Ministry of Agriculture for providing the helping hand that enabled him to harvest approximately 2 tonnes of rice.

"This has been a great help for me and I would like to encourage others to go into rice farming," said Mr Narayan.

The 'We Rice Up' programme was launched by Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama earlier this year on 1st April at Bavu Village in Nadi whereby he emphasized the need to produce more rice locally as Fiji, on average, imported 40,000 tonnes of rice annually, equating to about \$40million worth of rice grown in places like South East Asia, that ended up on the dinner tables of Fijian families.

The 'We Rice Up' programme promotes growing local rice for food security, whereby the Ministry will supply the seeds and assist with land preparation, and provides a platform for farmers to gain the technical know-how and machinery to become adequate rice farmers.

Aerobic rice is a renewed way of growing rice in non-submerged conditions in aerated soils. Aerobic rice is grown like any other crops such as Maize or Sorghum on dry land and rainfed soils. Varieties adapted to aerobic management systems require the ability to maintain rapid growth in soils with moisture content at or below field capacity.

The Gross Margins for rice cultivation ranges from an estimated yield of rice variety at 8tonnes per hectare and with an estimated price at \$0.80/kg should fetch an attractive \$6,400.00 per hectare.

NON-SUGAR AGRICULTURE SECTOR REACHES BILLION-DOLLAR MARK IN NOMINAL GDP IN 2018, AGRICULTURE REPORT REVEALS

The non-sugarcane agriculture sector became a billion-dollar industry in nominal GDP in 2018, a recent agriculture report revealed.

The '2020 Key Statistics on Fiji Agriculture Sector' Report was prepared by the Ministry of Agriculture's Fiji Agriculture and Rural Statistics Unit using official statistics from the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

The report showed that the non-sugarcane agriculture sector in 2018 amounted

to \$1.076b in nominal GDP and continued to maintain the billion-dollar mark a year after that.

In 2019, the non-sugar agriculture sector made it to \$1.218b in nominal GDP.

In addition, the Report stated that Fiji recorded a milestone in 2020 by achieving the highest value of \$106.7m from the domestic export of fresh/chilled produce (crop and livestock).

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the 2020 figures of the domestic exports of fresh and chilled produce of crop and livestock were analysed over eight years since 2013 and even took into account the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I cannot overemphasize just how important this fact is – it is a major achievement that in eight years, the agriculture

sector surpassed the \$100m mark. Eight years!

"I must thank all farmers, exporters, and all those who made this remarkable feat achievable. Vinaka Vakalevu for making the non-sugar agriculture sector great again," the Minister said.

The Report said in terms of Agriculture Trade (inclusive of crop, livestock, fisheries, forestry, sugar, mineral water, beverages etc) in

2020, Fiji's earnings from agricultural exports, which accounted for 60.1per cent (\$686.7m) of the national domestic exports, decreased by 7.8per cent.

However, for export of crop and livestock only (in all forms, value-added and fresh/chilled), which accounted for 22per cent of the national domestic export earnings, increased by 7.1per cent.

Further, the Report stated a positive growth was also recorded for both value and volume of only fresh/chilled produce domestic export by 25.8per cent and 16.3per cent respectively in 2020 compared to 2019.

The domestic export of fresh/chilled produce accounted for 9.3per cent of the national domestic export earnings.

WESTCROSS 3 WAS AN IMMENSE LOGISTICAL OPERATION

The success of the Ministry of Agriculture's three 'Operations WestCross' in transporting agro-inputs worth over \$84k and weighing approximately a total of 53 tonnes for Naitasiri farmers from Lautoka to the Sawani border was only possible through strong collaboration with relevant stakeholders.

Operation WestCross 3 took place on 29 June where agro-inputs worth \$42k and weighing 30 tonnes was again carefully organized and successfully executed.

Such an exercise of this magnitude took a lot of time including weekends to plan, with the supplier – South Pacific Fertilizers (SPF), the Agriculture team on the ground, and the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

It all started amid the lockdown when the strategic containment areas were defined and movements were restricted in the Central Division. In his daily brief to the operations team, the Regional Manager Central, Mr Mohammed Kadir Khan highlighted the plight of farmers in his division and their need for agro-inputs. Under the leadership of the Head of Agriculture Operations and Services, Dr Vinesh Kumar, a team that included Regional Manager Central and Senior Agriculture Officer Ra, Mr Sandeep Sharma met virtually around 9pm to draw up a plan.

"I was assigned to handle the logistics

from the West to Central whilst RMC Kadir was assigned to look after orders and distribution in Central. Initially, we thought of taking Operation Westcross 1 through the highlands of Viti Levu following the Monasavu Road but we were thankful that we were allowed to take it through the Logani border," Mr Sharma said.

"Our plan was discussed with the CEO of SPF, who gave his full support for this Operation. Finally, 'Operation WestCross' was a go-go."

He said the logistics from loading to delivery at Sawani border was closely monitored and guided by the Head of Agriculture Operations and Services.

"Knowing that crossing the Logani border to sell fertilizer at Sawani border was highly risky, did not deter our driver, Epeli Rasaqa from Rakiraki to agree to drive the truck inside the containment area. Satish Chand and Abhay Nand also made sacrifices working in the weekend and after working hours to make this operation successful."

Mr. Sharma said they encountered challenges such as looking for ropes to tie down the load, tarpaulin to cover it and even attending to load 'slips' on the way.

"But with a great working relationship with other stakeholders, we managed to sort

things out. We are here to serve our farmers and my team in the West is ready to deliver even in extreme situations."

Regional Manager Central, Mr Khan echoed similar sentiments adding that the current pandemic added to the challenge in organizing such an operation.

"It takes time and resources to organize the logistics, especially during this difficult time. We coordinated with the Roko Tui, the Provincial Administrator, District Advisory Councillors, the Turaga Ni Koro and locality officers to liaise with farmers who needed the agro inputs," he said.

"Once we received the confirmation order from our partners on the ground, we then communicated with the Head of Agriculture Operations and Services to initiate 'Operation WestCross,'" Mr Khan said

Mr. Khan said something he learnt during this Operation was the satisfaction he derived from meeting the needs of farmers on time, as that and trust were the main commodities that were important to the latter.

The Ministry facilitated the three Operations WestCross last month for the Naitasiri farmers, as well as a separate exercise for Tailevu North farmers in late May.



Agro inputs off-loaded at Sawani border

FIJI AND INDIA VIRTUALLY SIGN OFF ON AGRICULTURE SUPPORT



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy with the Acting Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, Mr Saifullah Khan (2nd from right) with a delegate from the Indian High Commission and senior staff of the Ministry

An agreement to provide further support to Fiji's Dairy Industry, Rice Industry Development, Root Crop Diversification, Water Resources Management and other areas of agriculture development such as food processing, value addition, and market access was signed between the Governments of Fiji and India.

The virtual signing of the Memorandum of Understanding was done between the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and his Indian counterpart – Minister for Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Hon. Shri Narendra Singh Tomar on Tuesday evening (22.6.21).

"These joint activities and programmes will be achieved through technical support, exchange of scientific materials and training," the Hon Dr Reddy said.

He said the event marked another very important milestone in the Ministry's Bilateral Engagement Calendar.

"I'm candidly grateful to the Government of the Republic of India for agreeing to finalise this commitment that will contribute significantly to the development of Fiji's agriculture sector," the Minister said.

"This MoU and its accompanying plan will help Fiji foster progress and bring our work in line with the goals set out in the Ministry of Agriculture Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 which considers targets of 5 year and 20 year National Development Plan, focusing on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals."

Minister Reddy explained to his Indian counterpart, Hon. Tomar how the Ministry was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic where an Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan was designed to focus on initiatives to support priorities of the Agriculture five year Strategic Development Plan (2019-2023).

"The plan includes long term food and nutrition security through the distribution of seeds and seedlings to rural and urban

communities, support commercial agriculture ventures through investment promotion, construction and upgrade of farm roads to create market access, the establishment of nursery and orchards to ensure a sustainable and extensive seed bank," he said.

In addition, Hon. Dr Reddy said progressively, the plan focused on expanding agriculture to its full potential to raise national income and become the leading export earner for the country and at the same time addressed key objectives of improving rural livelihoods.

Those that attended the virtual signing ceremony included Acting Indian High Commissioner to Fiji, H.E. Saifullah Khan, Fiji's High Commissioner to India, H.E. Kamlesh Sashi Prakash, and delegations from both the Ministry of Agriculture Fiji and Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare India.

COMPOST FERTILIZER RESEARCH UNDER CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE UNDERWAY



Organic Compost Fertilizer piles at the Koronivia Research Station.

Research is currently underway by the Agronomy Research Team under the Ministry of Agriculture on a formula to compost various waste materials and boost it with rich sources of nitrogen and phosphorous to create a compost fertilizer that will have the nutrients readily available for crops to grow productively.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Agronomy Research Team, Senior Research Officer, Dr. Tekini Nakidakida said they understood that replacing chemical fertilizer was a very big challenge because not every nutrient that a crop needed was readily available in the soil.

“Nutrients naturally available for crops to grow are produced when micro-organisms decompose or break down organic matter available in the soil. Chemical fertilizers were manufactured to make nutrients readily

available for crops to grow,” Dr. Nakidakida explained.

He said socio-economic aspects of agriculture could not be sidelined.

“Farm size will dictate whether a farmer can totally replace chemical fertilizers with organic substitutes or reduce the application of chemical fertilizers and replenish the deficiency with organics.

“What if we could pre-decompose organic matter through an efficient composting process and have a compost fertilizer that also has nutrients readily available for our crops to grow productively?” Dr. Nakidakida asked.

He added the pandemic had given them more time to carry out field tests and observations to provide farmers with as much information as required.

Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr.

Ritesh Dass said the Ministry understood the importance of chemical fertilizers 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.

“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.”

“We plead with our farmers to practice sustainable agriculture and do not abusively apply chemical fertilizers.”

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



Ms. Prashila Priya Mohini

THE NEW SENIOR ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER - PERSONNEL

Meet our newly appointed Senior Administrative Officer - Personnel, Ms. Prashila Priya Mohini.

Priya is originally from Muaniwani, Naitasiri. Prior to joining Ministry of Agriculture, she was with the Ministry of Defence, National Security and Policing. She graduated from Seoul National University with a Master’s in Public Administration and Reform and completed her Bachelors and Postgraduate diploma at University of the South Pacific.

Priya expresses herself as a self-motivated

and disciplined person who is always keen to up-skill herself by learning new things whenever she gets a chance. She believes her strengths lie in her analytical approach, human touch to the situations, appreciable communication and presentation skills. She sees herself as a relentless problem-solver who does not shy away from new challenges.

In her free time, she enjoys spending time with family and friends around a bowl of grog, sometimes cooking, listening to music, traveling, watching outdoor sports.

PHOTO GALLERY



PAO North Binesh Prasad visiting vegetable farmer Mr. Suresh Chandra of Tovata, Labasa.



Ministry staff during the vaccination drive at Naqara Island.



Ministry staff facilitating the farmers at the Sawani border.



Team Agriculture in whole of Government approach exercise for Covid-19.



Ministry staff distributing dalo suckers in Ba.



TRCO Leave Ms. Melina Rasaku during her farewell at the HR Division Office at Raiwaqa.



Rice Research team involved in threshing of Rice fertilizer trial plants from different treatments.



Ministry staff packing seeds at Koronivia Research Station.