



AGRICULTURE *Newsletter*



May Issue 2022

MINISTRY LAUNCHES ORGANIC COMPOST FORMULATION

Restoring degraded agricultural land to enable sustained production through organic practices to ensure healthy crops and food is a priority for the Ministry of Agriculture.

This was reiterated by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while launching the formulation and distribution of compost at Nabukadra Village in Nakorotubu, Ra.

“The Ministry will continue to work on composting of locally available materials and provide these to villages and settlements in the interior and coastal areas and to continue to encourage farmers to venture into organic agriculture.

“Farmers in most parts of the country are being urged to revise their farming practices and progressively implement more environmentally friendly and organic farming practices.

“Organic agriculture has been continuously promoted by the Ministry over the years which has led to the establishment of new initiatives

such as banning of weedicides, setting up of compost sites and production of bacterium culture.

Minister Reddy also made reference to the preferential market that existed for fresh Fijian organic-branded agricultural produce in particular turmeric, which had surpassed the export earnings of ginger as he called on farmers to move towards more organic farming to nurture and exploit the export market where organic produce fetched better prices.

Minister Reddy also elaborated that the Ministry had developed a local liquid organic fertilizer, Bacterium Culture, that could be applied directly to their farms or can assist in composting and later applied to their farms.

“In 2021, a total of 33 communities have been supplied with 100 tons of finished compost during the Covid-19 lockdown period to assist them with the production of crops for food security,” said Minister Reddy.

“The Ministry is also providing Bacterium

Culture and has distributed more than 11,000 litres to farmers. A total of 24 bacterium tanks and almost all of the Agriculture stations in the Central and Western Divisions have received and installed their 500litre tanks to supply Bacterium Culture free of charge to our farmers, while 10 x 200L drums have been installed at Nakorotubu District to support clusters working on Organic Agriculture.

It is envisaged that the formulation and distribution of compost throughout Fiji, will guarantee better soils for a better life and future.

Organic agriculture is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people as it relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects. The Ministry of Agriculture is actively promoting its Organic Initiative, the main objective of which was to reduce the consumption of synthetic or chemical fertilizers in Fiji.

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MINISTRY RECEIVES FINAL HANDOVER OF PROJECT SEEDLING 2021



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy receiving seedlings from the General Manager of BAT Fiji - Mr Damian Bruty

The Ministry of Agriculture received the final handover of seedlings under the British American Tobacco (BAT) Fiji's Project Seedling 2021 programme.

While officially receiving the last batch of seedlings under the Project Seedling at BAT Fiji's Leaf Growing Division in Votualevu, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy acknowledged BAT Fiji's commitment and comprehensive approach to sustainable agriculture, as it was indicative of their commitment to the Fijian economy.

"I want to acknowledge the continuous past contributions of BAT Fiji which has cultivated and distributed more than 140,000 assorted vegetable and fruit seedlings to our farmers via the Ministry of Agriculture in 2021-2022 alone.

"They have been supporting us from long

back since 2019 and we appreciate that today we will be receiving seedlings for eggplant and tomato and these seedlings are important, why is this important? Because it guarantees pretty much 100 per cent germination rate so I applaud the support that BAT has given us today with regards to the supply of vegetable seedlings," said Hon. Reddy.

He added that the Ministry would seek to continue the partnership with BAT Fiji as it also provided a strategic way for BAT Fiji, in continuing the utilization of its facility for similar projects, to deal with its corporate social responsibility toward the country's development objective.

Meanwhile General Manager of BAT Fiji, Damian Bruty said the organization was committed to helping farmers secure their food security, highlighting the impact that Project Seedlings has had on their partner farmers.

"BAT places great importance on the wellbeing of farmers who grow leaf for the Business. As tobacco is a seasonal crop, the business provides cash crop seedlings to the leaf farmers from the offseason of September to February. This is done under Project Seedling for which we are gathered

here today with our partner farmers.

"Previously, the business has supplied cucumber, tomato, pawpaw and lettuce seedlings, enabling farmers and helping to ensure their food security and also allowing for crop rotation on farmland and in the 2021-2022 Project Seedling season, BAT Fiji has cultivated 150,000 vegetable seedlings with the Ministry of Agriculture providing the seeds and distributing the seedlings as well," said Mr Bruty.

"Project Seedling enhances immediate food security and it also allows for an alternative source of income to support economic recovery, while simultaneously driving the good practice of crop rotation amongst our farmers, today we have a further 2,000 vegetable seedlings to distribute and we are committed to conducting the project again this year," added Mr Bruty.

Through Project Seedling BAT Fiji has cultivated and distributed more than 140,000 assorted vegetable and fruit seedlings to the Ministry of Agriculture in 2021-2022 alone. The project began in 2019 and represents BAT Fiji's support for the wider UN Sustainable Goals with a specific focus on Goal 2 - Zero Hunger.

The project has been conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture which supplies the vegetable and fruit seedlings to BAT Fiji. BAT Fiji uses its agricultural expertise and extensive greenhouse infrastructure located at the BAT Leaf Growing Division to cultivate the seedlings.

MINISTRY ROLLS OUT HYDROPONICS AND PROTECTED AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME

Nineteen successful applicants from the Western Division received their offer letters for the Ministry of Agriculture's Hydroponics and Protected Agriculture programme.

Seven farmers from within the greater Nadi area, together with 5 from Ba, 3 in Tavua and Rakiraki respectively and one

farmer from Nadrala in Sigatoka received their offer letters from the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

While handing over the offer letters to the recipients, Hon. Reddy stressed the objective of the supported and protected agriculture programmes was

geared toward improving the year-round production of crops and vegetables for local markets, particularly for the tourism sector.

"Our tourism sector has started to open up and we don't want to get the tourism sector to say that we don't have enough supply from within, we want to supply



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy with the recipient

to them and fulfil pretty much all the requirements but of course, there will be some fruits and vegetables that they will still have to import.

"We can save about \$25million if we supply consistently to the tourism sector. Then the other issue with the tourism sector is, they would say, yes, you can supply during the season but what about the offseason?"

"So to deal with the offseason, we want to extend the production to deal with the off-season, and therefore we want to provide supported and protected agriculture so that you can continue to supply during

the offseason when there is not enough rain and there are issues with the weather conditions," said Minister Reddy.

"So in this supported and protected agriculture, the three things that will play a critical role are plastic nurseries, greenhouse and hydroponics," he added.

Recipients were advised to prepare their project site according to the assistance package dimensions as the materials would be delivered as soon as the supply of the items was in-country, with the required training to be provided by the supplier with the Ministry of Agriculture technical staff assisting with the setup.

"What you need to do is ensure there is a space ready for the setup of the plastic house, so be mindful of the dimensions of the plastic house (6mx15m) so you should have enough flat space and for hydroponics, its 8m x 2.2m," said Minister Reddy.

"For hydroponics, you'll need electricity, and water so the closer to the house the better, so you'll need a lead wire ready and powerpoint and water source. So from there, within the system, everything will be provided for you to connect, the tank, the pump, the nutrient, the entire frame, cover and everything will be provided.

"For the first cycle, the first crop, the nutrient will be provided but later on, you will have to buy, so for the first harvest, the entire nutrient pack will be provided worth \$70, and after that, you will have to buy," Hon. Reddy elaborated.

The protected agriculture recipients will receive a 6metre x 15metre plastic house with a frame and instead of the usual shylon cloth, it'll be covered with plastic because that'll ensure that water doesn't sip in and it will come with additional accessories.

The hydroponics system will be 8metre x 2.2metre and can grow 400 plants at any one time and is scalable as the recipient can add on more shelving to the system, making it larger to cater for more plants to be grown within the system.

CALL FOR KORO ISLAND TO GO ORGANIC



PS Agriculture (middle) - Mr Vinesh Kumar, Regional Manager Central - Mr Mohammed Kadir Khan (1st from left), Officer In-charge Animal Health and Production Division - Mr Avinesh Dayal with a farmer in Koro

Farmers on the island of Koro in the Lomaiviti Group are being urged to revise their farming practices and progressively implement more environmentally friendly and organic farming practices.

This is in a bid to emulate the organic status of two islands in the Eastern Division, namely Rotuma and Cicia, the only two certified organic islands in the country, which were part of the overall Koro Island agriculture development plans of the Ministry of Agriculture.

While speaking to villagers of Vatulele Village and Nasau Village in Koro during a trip to the island in May, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy highlighted the

need to do away with reliance on inorganic fertilizers and chemicals.

“Koro gives a different image to our agricultural commodities, the image our crops from Koro gives in the external market - in the export market is unique, the commodities coming out of the Eastern Division gives a different and separate brand image to our commodities whether it be dalo or cassava, kava or other commodities, particularly those which can be supplied by our competitor countries like Vanuatu (kava), Samoa (dalo).

“Given that we have this pristine environment, we’ve got a different brand image for our commodities in our export destination countries and this gives us a leverage and price to our commodities and we want to maintain that brand image,”

said Minister Reddy.

“When we’re talking about the brand image, we also want Koro to be an organic island like Rotuma and Cicia, Rotuma is now a purely organic island, no fertilizers or chemicals are used on Rotuma,” he added.

“We want Koro to go organic in agriculture, the dalo should be organic, the kava should be organic, and it does not require a big effort and we will assist. Once you’ve been certified as an organic island, you can market your dalo, yaqona and all produce from here as organic produce and it fetches a good price.

He said that the Ministry would partner with the small poultry farm on the island to assist them and in return collect all the poultry manure to help establish the

island's organic manure.

Minister Reddy also elaborated that the Ministry had developed a local liquid organic fertilizer, Bacterium Culture that could be applied either directly to their farms or can be used to assist in composting and later applied to their farms.

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MINISTRY RECEIVES QUEEN BEES



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy receives the Queen Bees from Australia

The Ministry of Agriculture with Fiji Beekeepers Association under the Australian Aid-ACIAR Bees Project imported a total of 20 Pure Italian Strain of Queen Bees from Australia worth AUD\$4691.

These Apis Mellifera species mated Queen Bees from Perth, Western Australia will be quarantined on the remote island of Makogai

for 90 days.

After the 90 days of quarantine, 10 queen bees will be handed over to the Fiji Beekeepers Association for breeding and multiplication purposes and the remaining 10 Queen bees will be maintained by the Ministry of Agriculture for pure-line mating and distribution to commercial queen bee breeders/multiplication

centers around the country.

These Imported Bees have high Honey Production, are docile bees, and possess good brood production and pattern, have less tendency of swarming, have the ability to fight some pests and diseases, and have good hygienic behavior.

IMPROVED PIG BREEDING STOCK FOR KORO



Batiri Farm's Sanjesh Mur receives the improved pig breeds from Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Two piggery farms on the island of Koro have received improved pig breeding stocks to help improve the genetic makeup of pigs on the island.

In handing over the improved pig breeds to the two farmers, Batiri Farm's Sanjesh Mur and Nasau village headman Vilikesa Cokanasiga, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the Ministry's priority was ensuring food security on the island and the improved breeds were part of those plans.

"We are giving you this improved breed of piglets to, first of all, improve your current stock of pigs that you have in your piggery so that there is more value for money when you do decide to sell off one of your pigs in the future," said Minister Reddy.

"Also here on Koro, the two things that we are quite interested in is your food security. We want this island to be dependent on their produce as far as possible, which is why we've brought the improved piglets so that later on when they reproduce and expand the number of your pigs, it also boosts your food options," he said.

"It's good to see that you've at least got root crops, dalo and yams, rourou and we've also brought some vegetable seeds. You have the sea to provide you with seafood and I think that should be sufficient to have the basic food security of your household and we are also

promoting beef cattle here and we are happy to provide the improved variety of beef to those farmers who have got beef cattle and we want you to do commercial agriculture in those areas," he added.

Meanwhile, Vilikesa Cokanasiga, who owns 15 pigs, said being a recipient was a welcome surprise for him, adding that he now plans to provide the necessary assistance to his fellow villagers who would also want the improved pig breed.

"I thank the Government for giving me the pigs today as it will help me to improve my breed in my piggery, I look forward to looking after these piglets because I want to see the difference between my current stock and the qualities that this improved pig breeds have and I am just thankful to the Ministry for the assistance provided to me as a pig farmer," said Mr. Cokanasiga. "I am also ready to assist my fellow villagers who will want to improve their pig breeds through these two piglets."

"As a maritime community and as

farmers, the challenge to go commercial and to go full time into agriculture is a big one for us because there are opportunities available to us, the only part we need to do is farm and grow for the market," he said.

The Ministry handed over the piglets which were of the Large White pig breed along with bags of feed to both recipients. The Large White Breed can withstand adverse climate and environmental conditions and is a lean and active breed that has late maturity but has a large litter size. It is also considered to have excellent mothering abilities which are paramount for the expansion of a large commercial piggery farm.



Nasau village headman Vilikesa Cokanasiga receives the improved pig breeds from Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy

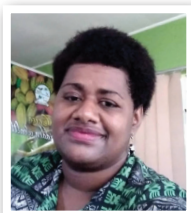
NEW APPOINTMENTS



Guo Fu Lao
Senior Research Officer
(Agronomy - Rice) KRS,
Crop Research



Namosimalua Baleira Rokotuiloma
Senior Technical Assistant
(LU-GIS) C/E,
LRPD



Susana Vatuveli
ATO Ra,
Animal Health & Production Division



Penione Raitala
Fieldman (Horticulture) SRS,
Crop Research



Kelemedi Maafu Sakilaki
Labourer (SRS)
Crop Research



Ashleen Ashnita Reddy
Agricultural Assistant (Deuba)
Navua,
Crop Extension



Abishay Anand Samy
Agricultural Assistant (Upper/Lower
Waidina/Viria/Muaniweni) Naqali,
AH&P



Avishek Ram Sharma
Field Assistant (Dobuilevu Research
Station) Crop Research



Ashneel Vinal Lal
Agricultural Assistant
(Suva Central/Toga) Lakena,
Crop Extension



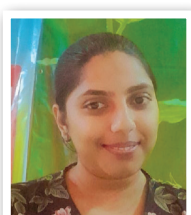
Sam Gordon Umu
Labourer (Nausori) Lakena,
Crop Extension



Vijendra Pramond Samy
Agricultural Officer (Pigs) Vatuwaqa,
AH&P



Vishwesh Waran
Agricultural Assistant (Navua)
AH&P



Shika Shristi Singh
Senior Technical Assistant (Horticulture
- Fruits Farming System) SqRS,
Crop Research



Melania Cibaiwasawasa
Labourer (Dobuilevu Research Station)
Crop Research

PHOTO GALLERY



The Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Vinesh Kumar received a courtesy visit from the DFAT Health Ambassador Ms. Stephanie Williams



Mother's Day celebration at the Lautoka Agriculture office



AH&P staff with Dr. Kiyoshi Sakai (2nd from right) a JICA volunteer who will work with Animal Health & Production Division for 2 years.



Mother's Day celebration at AH&P Vatuwaqa



PS Agriculture Vinesh Kumar, SRO Landuse Solomoni Nagaunavou, and SRO Tree Crops Dr Rohit Lal with Jaggi Vasudev (Sadhguru) a Soil Campaign from India, at the UNCCD COP 15, Save the Soils side event in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire



Eid celebration at Nausori Agriculture office



Bees team on Makogai Island