



Agriculture NEWSLETTER



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11,000 FIJIAN HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVE HOME GARDEN SEED PACKAGES



Seed distribution to homes around Suva corridor.

11,000 Fijian households have received the seed packages distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture since the exercise began early May.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said the initiative was for those who wanted to establish and re-establish their home gardens.

"We have made very good progress with regard to the distribution of home gardening seed packages to households who would want to engage themselves to secure food for their household, as well as utilise the free time that they have as they may be facing challenges during this pandemic, being locked in the containment zones."

In comparison, the Ministry had distributed approximately 50,000 seed packages over a 12 month period in 2020 but in the span of one month, it has already delivered 11,000 seed packages to the same number of doorsteps.

"And as I've said, we are very encouraged to see the response, over the last 4 weeks, we were able to distribute 11,000 seed packs to 11,000 households, and last year over the

COVID-19 pandemic, we distributed, over a 12 month period, 50,000 packs to 50,000 households, but in this short period, of just within a month, if you rate it, we've pretty much doubled the number of households who have received this assistance over a 4-week period, so we want to thank all those households and we are very encouraged with the positive response we are getting from these households, the positive comments and feedback," said Minister Reddy.

The distribution of home gardening seed packages is continuing with the emphasis being placed on the locked-down areas of the country, particularly on Viti Levu.

The seed packages were delivered to the doors or gates of the homes of Fijians.

The Ministry was working in close collaboration with the Fiji Police Force Community Policing on this program and ensured that strict COVID-19 protocols were followed by both the distributing teams and Fijians receiving the seed packages. This included wearing masks, regularly sanitizing hands, and practicing social distancing.

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CASH FOR CULTIVATION PROGRAM RECEIVES \$800K BOOST FROM AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and ADRA Fiji Country Director Iliapi Tuiwai during the press conference.

The timely assistance from the Australian Government and Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) will directly benefit 3,500 Fijian farmers while indirectly impacting scores more.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy expressed his appreciation to the Australian High Commissioner to Fiji, H.E. John Feakes for injecting AUD500,000 (around FJD\$800,000) into the 'Cash for Cultivation' program.

The Minister said the Program was unique given that it was output-based.

"To assist farmers to engage in this program, payments are made in two tranches, with \$75 given as advance in the first tranche," he said.

Dr. Reddy said the Cash for Cultivation program, designed to assist farmers with land preparatory activities, would deliver multiplier benefits.

"We are not only able to secure households with respect to food and nutritional security so they are able to plant their own crops for their personal household consumption, but the assistance also secures farmers' livelihoods because they will be able to have cash in their hand" he said. The Minister added that the cash injection will also assist with stimulating the rural economy.

"The money spent will circulate in the rural economy, which is a major stimulus for the rural economy to increase and expand. Cumulatively, we're able to support government's objective of expanding the agriculture sector, expanding agriculture output, and contributing to our quest to increase agriculture export," he said.

This initiative will benefit a total of 4000 farmers, in addition to the 1000 assisted with the first phase of the programme, which has been supported jointly by the New Zealand Government and EU through ADRA.

Attending the event on 24 May, at the Ministry of Agriculture Head Quarters, Australian High Commissioner to Fiji, H.E. John Feakes expressed his delight to work in partnership with Hon. Minister Reddy, the Ministry of Agriculture and ADRA to see the continued roll out of the programme.

ADRA Fiji Country Director, Mr. Iliapi Tuiwai said they had been working with the Ministry for some time now to help farmers who had been severely affected by the previous cyclones and other natural disasters.

"I am glad that this amount of money allocated to our people will benefit them, start them up and allow them to get back on their feet once again," he said.

The funds under the Cash for Cultivation Program, will be disbursed and monitored by ADRA and the programme rollout would be continued in the coming weeks.

FIJI LED NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON FOOD SYSTEMS



PS Agriculture Ritesh Dass (right) during the opening of the national dialogue on food systems - Action Track 1 at the Ministry of Agriculture conference room in Raiwaqa.

Fiji had a series of national dialogues on food systems ahead of the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) taking place in September 2021.

The first national dialogue on Action Track 1 to “ensure safe and nutritious food for all” was held virtually on Monday 10 May, 2021 and marked the commencement of a series of national dialogues across all five Action Tracks.

Officiating the online dialogue forum, Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass addressed the forum. “In Fiji and the Pacific, the food we eat brings us together as families, communities and nations and links us back to the land and sea, where our food is traditionally sourced from,” he said.

He further stressed that food underpinned our cultures, our economies and our relationships with the natural world.

“Our involvement in the Summit has come at a crucial time as our country battles

the COVID-19 pandemic once again. This makes this Food Systems Summit even more crucial to us as it will enable Fiji and the rest of the world to study the challenges exposed or exacerbated by the COVID crisis and to find transformative solutions to emerge and build back,” he further emphasised.

The Fiji national dialogues will consolidate diverse and transformative views and voices from stakeholders which would, feed into Fiji’s national report and submission to the UNFSS global Summit, being convened by UN Secretary-General António Guterres in September.

“Our national dialogues will enable Fiji to contribute to bold new actions to deliver progress on all 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems,” he said.

Action Track 1 is aimed at working, at a global level, to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition and reduce the incidence of non-

communicable disease, enabling all people to be nourished and healthy.

“This goal requires that all people at all times have access to sufficient quantities of affordable and safe food products.

“Achieving the goal means increasing the availability of nutritious food, making food more affordable and reducing inequalities in access to food.

“In essence, we are talking about ‘Food Security’ and this is pivotal given the challenges we face today, and the increasing nature of challenges we are likely to see going forward.”

An overwhelming and diverse group of 71 participants were part of the multi-stakeholder national dialogue from areas of science, business, policy, healthcare and academia, farmers, youth and women’s organisations, consumer groups and environmental activists.

7,500 FARMERS IN VANUA LEVU RECEIVE PLANTING MATERIALS UNDER TC YASA REHAB PROGRAM



MoA staff in the North working on planting materials for distribution to farmers affected by TC Yasa and Ana.

Almost 7,500 farmers in Vanua Levu have been assisted with kumala and yaqona cuttings and dalo suckers.

Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr. Ritesh Dass said the assistance was part of the TC's Yasa and Ana Rehabilitation Programme.

"The Ministry had committed its assistance to farmers following the devastation caused by TC's Yasa and Ana late last year and

early this year.

"Despite the current restrictions of COVID-19 we are ensuring that our farmers in the North will receive the planting materials they need to re-start their farms," he said.

Mr. Dass said the planting materials would help the Vanua Levu farmers get back on their feet and re-start the Northern economy.

As of Wednesday (26.5.21), the Ministry had assisted a total of 7,457 farmers.

A total of 2,546 farmers were provided with 78,270 kumala cuttings. The kumala cuttings were provided by ten suppliers.

In terms of yaqona cuttings, 127,121 were distributed to 2,508 farmers. The yaqona cuttings were provided by five suppliers.

Finally, the Ministry distributed 242,883 dalo suckers to 2,403 farmers. Six suppliers provided the dalo suckers to the Ministry.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT AT THE BORDERS



The Ministry of Agriculture was working in collaboration with farmers, vendors association, municipal councils, middlemen, and producers in facilitating farm produce

through checkpoints to various markets adhering to the COVID border transaction protocol.

A MIRACLE AND A BLESSING, SAYS PENI



Those were the words of Agriculture Assistant Tavua, Peni Matea who witnessed the delivery of a new born baby boy in the vehicle he was driving, to take the heavily expectant mum to the Tavua Hospital.

Mr. Matea was at the Nayarabale checkpoint in Tavua recently to monitor the exchange of fresh produce, when the pregnant mum, who traveled in a carrier from Nasomo, Vatukoula was dropped from the other side of the checkpoint and came across to his side to go to Tavua Hospital.

Mr. Matea said as his vehicle was the only one at that checkpoint at that time, he, RFMF personnel Private Levani Taka, and Nurse Atishma assisted the pregnant woman to the Hospital.

Speaking in i-Taukei he said they were still traveling to hospital when the woman gave birth on the way.

He said it was God's call that he happened to be there at the Nasomo border; adding, he was blessed to be part of the birthing process that saved two lives, despite the COVID-19 situation.

Mother and baby have since returned home.

Mr. Matea hails from Naiserelegi, Saivou, Ra.

NALOTAWA'S GESTURE OF LOVE TO BA FAMILIES UNDER ISOLATION

In an interesting development from the gracious gesture demonstrated by the people of Tikina o Nalotawa, Ba in handing over freshly harvested crops on Friday (28.05.21) to families under isolation in Ba – their relatives in the Marinitawa Farming Cluster planted their tenth acre of cassava, a day later.

The 19-member group also began planting one acre of duruka per farmer.

Spearheading this charge that is beginning to bear fruit is 'Rise Beyond the Reef' under its 'Basa Exchange' program.

Co-founder of 'Rise Beyond the Reef', Mr. Semi Lotawa said seven upper mountain villages from Tikina Nalotawa came together as 'suppliers' under this program.

"This initiative aims to include rural remote communities as actors in addressing food insecurity for those in lockdown or home quarantine. In return, households earn cash at village-gate for their produce.

"Due to the devaluation of crops during the pandemic, many remote communities who rely on their 'basa' income have been left cashless during the pandemic. They simply can't make enough from their crops to justify coming down to the market," Mr. Lotawa said.

He added the initiative was supported by the Fiji Women's Fund.

And seen joining the Cluster while they planted was Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Viam Pillay to show Government's support for such fantastic initiatives.

Hon. Pillay expressed his appreciation for the communal planting or 'solesolevaki' where families came together, united in a worthwhile cause.

The Assistant Minister was moved by the show of unity by the Cluster at a time of hardship the country faced.

While the Central Division continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, the Marinitawa farming Cluster together with

their families in the Tikina o Nalotawa, forge ahead in ensuring food security initiatives continue unhindered.

There are plans the Cluster have to also move into planting ginger, tumeric and vanilla.

The farming initiatives by the people of Tikina o Nalotawa, Ba have also been supported through a successful multi-sectoral approach where the Government agencies in the area worked together to lend technical assistance from their respective fields.

Vina Du Mr. Lotawa and 'Rise Beyond the Reef', Vina Du Marinitawa Farming Cluster, Vina Du Tikina o Nalotawa!



SEEDS DISTRIBUTION



Seed distribution to homes in the Suva-Nausori corridor.

The Ministry continued its distribution of Home Gardening seeds in collaboration with the Fiji Police Force in the Lami, Suva, and Nausori containment areas in an effort to provide food security for all Fijians during the lockdown period.



MELA AND MACIU PLANTED THE SEEDS



Mela and Maciu planted those seedlings that were distributed by the Ministry.

Here, Mela Katonivukilu and her son, six-year-old son Maciu Tuilevuka happily get their hands dirty to plant the seeds they received at their home on Nailuva Road, Suva.

“The hike in the price of vegetables at various supermarkets over the last few weeks is

appalling,” Mela said. “I am beginning to feel the pinch in my pockets every time I shop.”

“So instead of complaining, I made good use of the cauliflower, chinese cabbage, long bean and french bean seeds supplied by the Ministry of Agriculture.

“This is a great initiative by the Ministry seeing that we are turning to nature-based solutions during this COVID-19 era.

“I believe growing your own vegetables is now the new norm for Fiji.”

TEN REASONS WHY HOME GARDENING IS THE ULTIMATE LOCKDOWN ACTIVITY TO BE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN, ACCORDING TO A SUVA DAD

Emosi Uluilakeba, a father, shared his family's home gardening initiative in Nasova, a few minutes outside Suva City after receiving seed packs from the Ministry.

"One, to promote the impact of the Ministry's program; Two, it's a good stay-home activity for our children; Three, influence family bond; Four, influence a gardening lifestyle for our children; Five, teach our children how to utilize small available spaces; Six, teach our

children that vegetable home gardening contributes to family savings and budget; Seven, that without employment, vegetable home gardening is employment because it's money in a different form – vegetables; Eight, there's no satisfaction one can get than that feeling an intrinsic reward gives you; Nine, telling them that when you will harvest and eat from the good fruits from your sweat, the feeling is different - it's a mixture of pride (not the haughty

kind of pride), happiness and satisfaction; and finally, stressed to my children the difference between cultivating legal vegetation that builds a life in contrast to illegal vegetation that destroys life."

"Vinaka Vakalevu MoA! This is a lockdown well spent by my family whilst I'm committed to work," he added.



30 HOUSEHOLDS IN RA RECEIVE SEED PACKAGES



The Ministry was more than happy to assist a community of 30 households that reached out requesting for home gardening seeds.

Matawailevu Village in Ra, Village Headman, Iseia Vonowale was thankful for the assistance.

Speaking in i-Taukei, he said the assistance was certainly timely given the current situation the country was facing with the COVID-19 pandemic and thus would go a long way towards their food security.

The seed packages included cabbage, tomatoes, eggplant, pumpkins, and beans.

VANUA LEVU HOUSEHOLDS LEARN CLIMATE SMART AGRICULTURE AND GIVEN SEEDLINGS FOR FOOD SECURITY



Five hundred (500) households in Vanua Levu were enlightened about climate smart agriculture before being provided seedlings for their food security in May.

The training was made possible thanks to the collaboration between Live and Learn Fiji and Ministry of Agriculture.

The objective of the climate smart agriculture training was to teach farmers about food security sustainability. With the knowledge gained, farmers would have the skills of seed sowing and extraction.

The farmers were also trained to identify issues of agricultural development in the context of climate change and gender related issues.

The Ministry of Agriculture provided seeds for eggplant, tomatoes and chillies that were raised first by Live and Learn before it was handed out to farmers as seedlings ready to be planted for food security.

The households were also given agricultural toolkits including a knife, file, digging hoe and a post hole spade donated by the Australian Humanitarian and Partnership.

MINISTRY ASSISTED PINEAPPLE FARMERS TO TRANSPORT FERTILIZER



The Ministry was glad to assist commercial pineapple farmers in Tailevu North with the transportation of much needed fertilisers for their farms.

The fertilisers worth over \$5k was loaded from Suva to the Logani, Tailevu border on 21 May.

At the Logani border waited the leader of the Vulagi Farmers Association, Mr Balbir Singh to receive the goods on behalf of his 30-strong members.

TEAM CENTRAL RECEIVED THE ASTRAZENECA COVID-19 VACCINATION



Team Agriculture at Central Office, Nausori was the first to receive the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccination for civil servants in Nausori.

Agriculture Assistant Bau, Safiya Raqoli said she did not feel the jab and urged all Fijians to take the vaccine.

"It's for our benefit," she said. Senior Agriculture Officer Kadavu, Joseph Smith said the entire process was good and praised the efficiency of the Health Team.

"It was my first dose and it was great. I urge all Fijians to get vaccinated," he said.

The one-day vaccination drive for civil servants in Nausori was at the Ministry of Agriculture Office at Ratu Cakobau House.

PHOTO GALLERY



Minister Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Senior Management at the Logani Border.



Seed distribution by MoA staff with assistance from Fiji Police Officials.



Seed distribution to Community Leaders.



Nalotawa District villagers contribute food produce to families in isolation.



MoA staff undergoing Training on Infection Prevention and Control for COVID-19 with Ministry of Health.



Central staff farewell Mr. Paula Tuione to his new posting as Director Development i-Taukei Affairs



Rice harvesting in Namara, Labasa.



Stray Dog trap-neuter-release 1 week campaign in Savusavu with the locality staff in mid-May.