



# Agriculture NEWSLETTER



May - June Issue 2020

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## A SUCCESSFUL HOME GARDENING INITIATIVE



*MoA Executive Management  
during the launch of the seed packages*

The Ministry of Agriculture received a positive response from the public on the seeds distributed for Home Gardening under the Ministry's COVID-19 Rapid Response Programmes from mid-March to 22 May 2020.

The Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said the Ministry distributed 36,495 home gardening packages containing seeds of 6-12 different crops, ensuring access to food of acceptable quality and nutritional value.

This comprised of over 16,391 packages to the Central Division, 13,137 in the Western Division, 983 in the eastern and 2,142 packages in the Northern Division.

Over 3,842 packages were distributed to faith based organisations, and employees of non-government organisations and corporate entities aimed at people who have been directly impacted by the effects of COVID-19.

"Whilst we distributed such large number of packs to households, everyone who benefitted from the programme have put the offer to good use and worked to produce home grown vegetables for own consumption," said Dr. Reddy.

"Social media and other the dailies have come alive with stories and pictures of Home Gardening in action. Entire Fiji is abuzz with this initiative and it is really heartening to see how all households are now going back to our roots when we all used to have home gardens in our own homes."

He said over the eight weeks, momentum had been gained in terms of mobilizing the household sector to practice home gardening, bringing the small available land around ordinary Fijian households into farming.

"I want to thank the entire household sector in Fiji for joining the Ministry of Agriculture in this journey to mobilize them to get the vacant land around their home into production," said Dr. Reddy.

# \$28.9M DAMAGE TO AGRICULTURE SECTOR



MoA Officials prepare to deploy teams for TC Harold response trip to Kadavu and Lau Group

The damage sustained during Tropical Cyclone Harold to the agriculture sector alone stood at \$28.9million.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said that Tropical Cyclone Harold had devastated the agriculture sector.

He said the Ministry of Agriculture intervened through the provision of assistance to the affected farmers via the supply of agro-inputs.

As part of the instant national

on 02nd May 2020.

The Yasawa Group of islands received 7,000 Kumala cuttings and 65 seed packages, 3,000 Kumala cuttings were distributed to Malolo, while Vatulele received 4,000 Kumala cuttings and 200 eggplant seedlings. On the 26th of May 2020, a total of 5,000 Kumala cuttings and cassava cuttings were distributed again to the Lau Group.

As part of the livestock sub-sector rehabilitation effort, 4,032 day-

response, a total of 20,600 Kumala cuttings, 300 seed packs, and 5,000 cassava cuttings was delivered to Kadavu on 28th April 2020; with an additional 10,000 Kumala cuttings, 200 seed packs, and 5,000 cassava cuttings delivered to Lau

old broiler chicks valued at \$10,080.00 were distributed to 243 farms in Serua, Tailevu, Rewa, and Naitasiri Provinces.

To secure root crops for future use and as a precautionary measure against predation by livestock, the Ministry distributed 15 coils of 3 feet X 50-meter goat fence wire valued at FJ\$1,500.00 to pig farmers in Lau and Kadavu.

Dr. Reddy said veterinary drugs and drenches worth of FJ\$1,148.40 were supplied to the islands of Lau and Kadavu provinces for the treatment and health maintenance of existing livestock.

The initiatives were part of a broader package of programs, initiatives, and reforms that are being undertaken to accelerate the growth of the agriculture sector.

“Our national vision for agriculture as set out in the 5-year Strategic Development Plan and the Government’s 20 year National Development Plan aims to build a competitive, sustainable, and resilient agriculture sector.”

## SABETO FARMERS PIONEERED AMA CONTRACTUAL FARMING



Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (sitting: 3rd from right) with PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass (sitting: 4th from left) and CEO AMA - Mr. Alvin Singh (sitting: 3rd from left) and farmers during the contract signing.

Fifteen farmers of Sabeto, Nadi were part of the pioneering group of the Contractual Farming initiative of the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA).

along with the AMA’s and farmers obligations are also stipulated in it.

In announcing the contract signing, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said it

These farmers signed contractual agreements with the AMA on 4 May to provide them with the quantity of the required produce, and the intervals at which the produce would be required at; as part of the contract agreement, a determined pricing range that will be paid to the farmers

was a historic day as farmers would now be contracted, therefore treating farming as a business, the first step towards making agriculture a billion dollar export industry.

He highlighted the role of AMA, which was to secure local and international markets, ensure a consistent volume of supply, and to guarantee the quality of the required produce.

Minister Reddy also invited investors to consider agriculture as a viable business opportunity stating; “There is no better time to invest in agriculture than now.”

“If there is anything good that has come out of COVID-19, it has renewed our interest in agriculture, mobilized the entire country to get



into agriculture, re-energize everyone that this is where the money is and that this is the future of this country,” said Minister Reddy.

He also highlighted the overwhelming response from members of the public in recently announced agricultural initiatives.

“Two weeks ago, every day from 7.00am, there was a long line of people in front of our Raiwaqa Agriculture Office, people were waiting for their home gardening packages. That is the level of interest generated amongst our people.”

“We are here, and ready to

support you. The only prerequisite is that it must be a commercial business model,” he explained.

“We are also calling out to all organizations, institutions, commercial agricultural enterprises and potential agriculture enterprises to come forward and support the Ministry,” he urged.

“There can be no better investment than in the proposed, market-driven commercial agriculture venture, serving the dual purpose of food and nutritional security and to expand agriculture to become the main exporter for this

country.”

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the Sabeto farmers, Mr. Sunil Prasad thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Marketing Authority for their support in getting farmers to be a part of the contractual farming initiative.

“For me, this is history, I am now 60-years-old and we are here today to sign a contract to supply to the AMA. I am very thankful to the Minister Hon. Mahendra Reddy for his support for us and I believe that this will only benefit us farmers in the long run,” said Mr. Prasad.

## FIJI'S FIRST STATE OF THE ART GREENHOUSE TO BE ESTABLISHED



*A nursery in Nacolevu, Sigatoka*

A brand new state of the art greenhouse will soon be established at the Ministry of Agriculture's Koronivia Research Station (KRS), the first to be built for the Ministry.

This has been made possible through partnership between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFIL), underscoring the importance of enhancing Fiji's food security preparedness. The total project is expected to cost over CAD210,000 (FJD339,272) and will be completed over 8 months.

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic exposing the vulnerabilities of the global economy, while

underscoring the importance of food security, managing food security risks and the urgent need to remain adaptive and forward looking, the Greenhouse project is earmarked to alleviate some of these key challenges locally.

This project enhances food security preparedness through a stable and accessible supply chain for seeds and planting material in Fiji through 3 main objectives;

i. Building a bio-secured climate-controlled greenhouse facility to increase productivity of Government's central crop nursery, promote multiplication, adaptive crops and to secure the supply chain for seedlings throughout the country at all times;

ii. Building a strong information network of crop nurseries nationwide, and;

iii. Support research capacity including 22 female research staff.

Currently, the KRS nursery is essentially a field nursery containing over 60 crop varieties and doubles as a multiplication centre, with the Research Station being a key repository for food security supplying seedlings throughout Fiji.

It is estimated that cyclones and flood losses also translate into an average of 25,700 people being pushed into poverty every year in Fiji.

With over 70% of Fiji's agricultural households being reliant on subsistence agriculture, Government crop nurseries are, and will continue to be a vital repository and a supplier of crop material.

In the long-term, the Greenhouse Project is anticipated to provide a stable repository and supply chain comprising public, private and farmer nurseries that provide local seeds and planting material at all times; with an expected increase in crop yield and overall productivity due to healthy and resilient crops.

Additionally, accredited greenhouse/crop nurseries including the KRS, public and private nurseries, that act as first responders during times of natural crisis will be strengthened and will also see the increased participation of women in agriculture, management and agricultural science fields.



# MINISTRY LAUNCHES YELLOW CASSAVA VARIETY



Minister for Agriculture - Dr. Mahendra Reddy (3rd from left), PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass (1st from left), AMA CEO - Mr. Alvin Singh (1st from right), SRO Agronomy - Mr. Savenaca Cuguma (2nd from left) with the Nataleira Village Turaga ni Koro - Mr. Asaeli Donu hands over cassava cuttings during the launching of the Yellow Cassava variety.

In an bid to strengthen the export market the Ministry of Agriculture launched the Beqa Variety Yellow Cassava at Nataleira Village Community Hall in Dawasamu, Tailevu on 15 June 2020.

While officiating at the launch, the Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the variety

was in high demand, both in local and overseas markets as compared to the white varieties due to its huge consumer preferences.

“There are real opportunities in yellow cassava due to the huge market demand in Australia as per a recent survey, with serious interest from

an importer in Australia who has indicated an estimated demand of 15 tonnes per week of yellow cassava,” said Minister Reddy.

This opportunity is significant for Fiji hence the growth in this variety would result in incremental export revenue for Fiji.

Yellow cassava is cultivated in Fiji, but not as widely as the white varieties of the Nadelei and New Guinea variety.

It takes eight to nine months to mature with an average yield of 25 to 28 tonnes per hectare. This variety is drought tolerant and survives in poor marginal soils, and thrives well in sandy and loam soils.

So far the Ministry of Agriculture has supplied 4,000 yellow cassava cuttings to farmers in Lomaivuna and 3,000 cuttings to the Navunisea and Delai farmers. These farmers are contracted under the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) to plant yellow cassava on a commercial level for the export market.

## MINISTRY LAUNCHED ORGANIC BACTERIUM



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Mahendra Reddy during the launch of the Bacterium Culture.

The introduction of organic agriculture into Fiji's production system is the best option to ensure the

sustainability of our natural resources.

This was shared by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and

Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the launch of the Organic Bacterium fertilizer at the Ministry of Agriculture's Sigatoka Research Station on 10 June 2020.

Organic agriculture as defined by Organics International is a production system that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems, and people. It relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of inputs with adverse effects.

Minister Reddy said organic fertilizers were a kinder, gentler way to give plants the nutrients they need and its benefits include;

1. The release of nutrients at a more slower pace in the soil when needed by the plant, making them long lasting;
2. The nutrients are contained in



complex molecules that won't leach away with the first rain;

3. They are less likely to burn the young roots of seedlings, and;

4. They enhance soil health by nurturing (or at least not harming) the soil microbes that help make soil nutrients available to plants.

"Even large plantations of cash crops like cocoa and coconut, kava and vegetables are facing risks of environmental degradation of epic proportions," said Hon. Reddy

A component of the organic bacterium fertilizer launched today is the use of *Lactobacillus*, a facultative

anaerobic bacteria, which fortifies fertilizers and when put in the soil, immensely improves cultivation.

"It also allows for slow release of nutrients found in the rhizosphere to be absorbed by the plants slowly over time. The roots become healthy and exudates composition dependent and disease suppressive soil allowing for progressive soil remediation," said Minister Reddy.

"This fermented fertilizer improves the growth of plants when applied as foliar spray to seedlings and soil or compost drench. It also improves their efficacy in up-taking

nutrients so naturally, growth is enhanced," Hon. Reddy said.

However with the use of these microorganisms, the micro and macro nutrients spray or drench to feed the plants become more present and easily absorbable by the plants; this is a consequence of the increased efficiency of nutrients.

On the farm, *Lactobacillus* acts as the soil probiotic, making it a perfect medium for organic farming. It populates in the soil and staves out pathogens.

## MINISTRY REINTRODUCED RICE CULTIVATION FOR SUGARCANE GROWERS



Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (1st from left), PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass (2nd from left) Sugar Research Institute Senior Executive Management during the Rice initiative announcement in Lautoka.

The Ministry of Agriculture officially launched its Rice Expansion Initiative and has reintroduced rice cultivation for sugarcane growers around Fiji.

While announcing the initiative at the Sugar Research Institute in Drasa, Lautoka on 6 May, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy rationalized the program as being one that would ensure Fiji gradually achieves self-sufficiency in rice production.

He highlighted that under this initiative, each sugarcane farmer was encouraged to plant at least one acre of rice, as the Ministry would provide them with seeds of improved high yielding varieties that could be grown under rain fed climatic conditions.

Minister Reddy elaborated that the Ministry would provide 30 kilograms of rice seeds at no cost to every sugarcane farmer.

"We want each sugarcane farmer

to plant rice as a supplementary and complementary crop; it could supplement your food and income security, it has also proven to be a good complementary crop rotation with sugarcane."

He added that about 8,000 metric tonnes of rice was produced and consumed locally.

"We have achieved around 66 percent self-sufficiency of rice production before and this can be done again as the agro-climatic conditions in Fiji are exceptionally favourable for rice cultivation," he said.

Hon. Reddy said we have around 7000 acres of land under rice cultivation and to achieve self-sufficiency, a total of 24,000 acres of land with 2 crops per year was needed.

"In 2019, Fiji imported \$42.6m worth of rice into Fiji, and that is equivalent to around 40,000 metric tonnes of rice.

"Cultivation of rice is not new to the cane farming communities as historically every farming entity, especially sugarcane farming households were self-sufficient," said Hon. Reddy.

Five tonnes of star variety seeds were also handed to 166 sugarcane farmers to help initiate their rice farming.

# AMA FAREWELLS FORMER CEO

The Agricultural Marketing Authority of Fiji farewelled former Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Setariki Tale for his services from 2016 to early 2020.

Speaking during the farewell, the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy acknowledged Mr Tale for his services to AMA and described him as a good man with a calm personality.

“Some exceptional qualities of Setariki are that he is always humble, positive, and he denies no work given to him,” said Dr. Reddy.

He said the Fiji Agromarketing Authority was established from national interest to provide access to markets for Fijian farmers.

“Every organisation has its lapses, nothing is perfect and AMA has also faced some turbulent times, but it was Setariki’s leadership that pulled AMA through.”



Mr. Setariki Tale (2nd from left) being farewelled by the Minister for Agriculture - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and Executive Officials from AMA.

“Setariki, along with his team, has built AMA to what it is today and we thank him for his leadership,” said Dr. Reddy.

Mr. Tale while delivering his remarks said he was happy to be given the responsibility to look at ways to build and stabilise the company.

“While on the job, your priority should be the legacy you leave behind when your time is over from an organisation,” said Mr. Tale.

Mr. Tale expressed his appreciation to the hardworking

staff at AMA and said the organisation was not just a company, but a family.

He also acknowledged the new leadership and was confident AMA was in good hands.

“Even though I attended only one meeting with the new board, I could see the experience that the new board brings to the company and I am sure with their experience

and the newly appointed CEO, AMA will move to another level,” added Mr. Tale.

He also thanked the Minister for Agriculture for his guidance and leadership through the years of his service to AMA.

“We will grow when we continue to support the leadership and continue to put our best foot forward and take responsibility for the company and its business aspirations,” Mr. Tale said.

## LOCAL MARKET PRICES JUNE 2020

### AMARANTHUS

(*Amaranthus viridis*)



**\$2.17 per KG**

### BANANA

(*Musa sapientum*)



**\$2.05 per KG**

### CHINESE CABBAGE

(*Brassica chinensis*)



**\$1.79 per KG**

### LETTUCE

(*Lactuca sativa*)



**\$2.23 per KG**

### CASSAVA

(*Manihot esculenta*)



**\$2.22 per KG**

### CARROT

(*Daucus carota*)



**\$2.78 per KG**

### CITRUS

(*Citrofolia sinensis*)



**\$3.50 per KG**

### EGGPLANT

(*Solanum melongena*)



**\$2.45 per KG**



# NATIONAL RICE ASSISTANCE ANNOUNCED



Minister presenting his keynote address at Grace Roads farm in Nadi.

The Ministry of Agriculture has announced a national rice assistance package targeting a wide cross-section of the community.

While announcing the initiative in Sabeto, Nadi on 4 May, the Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy rationalized the program as being one that would ensure Fiji gradually achieves self-sufficiency in rice production.

He highlighted that with rice being a staple food source and being widely consumed by every household in Fiji, it was an essential commodity, therefore requiring the Ministry's upscaling of assistance to ensure

improved yield and production.

"In 2019, Fiji imported \$42.6m worth of rice into Fiji, equivalent to around 40,000 metric tonnes of rice. "About 8,000 metric tonnes of rice is produced and consumed locally and historically, we have achieved around 66% self-sufficiency of

rice production, so we know it can be done as the agro-climatic conditions in Fiji are exceptionally favourable for rice cultivation," said Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy stated that a total of 24,000 acres of land was required to achieve 100% self-sufficiency for rice with 2 crops per year; an achievable aspiration that would require unity to achieve at the earliest.

To achieve this, the Ministry of Agriculture will implement the following strategies:

1. Up to 30KG (for 1-acre farms) rice seeds will be provided to every sugarcane farmer. Assistance on milling their rice for home

consumption will be provided through small portable rice mills close to their area when the rice paddy is ready for milling;

2. Up to 30KG (for 1-acre farms) rice seeds will be provided to every non-sugarcane farmer. Assistance on milling their rice for home consumption will be provided through small portable rice mills close to their area when the rice paddy is ready for milling;

3. Rice seeds will be provided to all 1,100 villages for community-based rice farming. The seeds are to be provided:

i. Following a signed commitment by the village Turagani-Koro;

ii. The amount of rice seed to be provided will be equivalent to the population size of the village;

iii. That the village attend short training on rice cultivation;

iv. That the village allocates a dedicated communal land and appoints a dedicated "Rice Growing Cluster".

"Given our record of production, I do understand that we cannot realize this in the immediate term, but progressively over the next 10 years," said Hon. Reddy.

## NEW APPOINTEES FROM MAY & JUNE 2020

No.	Surname	Name	Post	Station	Status
1.	Duguivalu	Apenisa	Senior Information Assistant (i-Taukei)	Headquarters - Information Section	New Intake
2.	Hazeem	Mohammed	Agricultural Assistant (Sheep-Nawaicoba)	Nawaicoba Agriculture Station	New Intake
3.	Vakarau	Mere Qiodravu	Clerical Officer (Assets)	Headquarters - HR	New Intake
4.	Ratogotogo	Analaisa	Messenger (Administration)	Koronivia Research Station	New Intake
5.	Vakararawa	Filimoni Qereqeretabua	Clerical Officer (Koronivia)	Koronivia - Dairy	New Intake
6.	Temo	Barbara	Principal Economic Planning Officer (Monitoring & Evaluation)	Headquarters - EP&S	New Intake
7.	Saro	Sitiveni	Temporary Relieving Clerical Officer (PPU) He joined 14/11/2019	Headquarters - HR	Resignation



# PHOTO GALLERY



Ministry launches Bacterium Culture at Nacocolevu, Sigatoka



Backyard packs delivery to Lawaqa Agriculture station



LRPD officers planting vertiver on a farm.



Ministry conducts Home Gardening competition to empower Food and Nutrition Security in the local communities.



Ministry officials assist public in ensuring flow of food supply during the Lockdown.



HR Division farewells hard working Sitiveni Saro who has resigned from the Ministry.



Ministry staff braving the cold river to get across to a farm in Nasarawaqa, Bua.



Government Clean Up week at Nauluvatu Settlement, Suva.