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COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE PROGRAMMES HANDED OVER TO MACUATA FARMERS



Handing over of the Commercial Agriculture Development programmes at the Commissioner Northern's Office.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy handed over offer letters to 11 successful recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture's commercial development programmes on 23 November.

While officiating at the handing over ceremony at the Commissioner Northern's Office in Macuata House, Labasa, Minister Reddy said the expansion of commercial agriculture in the country had proceeded exceptionally well over these past three years despite numerous binding constraints.

"Today we are here to launch the three facilities out of our commercial agriculture development programmes.

The three programmes are the Women in Agriculture (2 recipients), Land Clearing Development (7 recipients) and Orchard Development (2 recipients) programme.

With respect to the Orchard Development Programme, Minister Reddy expressly stated in absolute terms, that there were no issues with Fiji's food security as there was an abundance of food in the country, however, increasing nutrition security was the focus under the Orchard Development programme to address the lack of a balanced diet in Fijian households.

"We want to deal with this in two ways, one, our programme will ensure that people have access to seedlings and fruit trees in the urban areas and secondly, is to increase supply to an extent where the price of fruits goes down and therefore is affordable and accessible to all households in Fiji.

"To do that we want to establish dedicated fruit tree orchards, at the moment, the breadfruit and mango you get, it's all wildly grown. Rarely you'll see a breadfruit orchard, a mango orchard, a dragonfruit orchard, or guava orchard, you'll see those in minimal numbers because we started developing those last year," said Minister Reddy.

He also elaborated on the intent behind the Land Clearing programme, which was to expand commercial agriculture and to bring in productive,

unused virgin land under agriculture.

"This programme was very popular, there are land owning groups, individual farmers and settlements that have land but lack the resources to clear and prepare that land and have planting material.

"The recipients of the Land Clearing facility will receive assistance through the provision of bulldozers, that will come and clear the identified land, we'll come with the excavator and clear the drainage and we'll come with the tractor to prepare the land and also provide the planting material," Hon. Reddy.

He added that these steps taken by the Ministry would expand agriculture, a little at a time, in the nations' interest.

Minister Reddy has also called for more participation from women farmers to take the leadership role in agricultural entrepreneurship, especially via the Women in Agriculture programme.

He acknowledged the efforts of the successful recipients of the programmes as they had each earned their place through merit and their agricultural dedication.

He also highlighted that the priority of the Ministry remained on ensuring the nation's food and nutritional security, especially in light of the global pandemic.

"It was encouraging to note how people mobilized themselves to utilize their time and secure their households food security and at the same time, we were able to get farmers at the farm level to increase production so that we could deal with arbitrary increases in prices," he said.

Minister Reddy also highlighted some of the ongoing programmes of the Ministry such as the Farms Support Package, the Home Gardening programme and the subsidized land preparation programme, which was still being fully utilised by Fijian households.

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LAND CLEARING PROGRAMME TO BEGIN IN CENTRAL DIVISION



Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with the recipients.

10 mataqalis (land owning units) and 14 individual farmers from within the Central Division received their offer letters for the commencement of land clearing works on their farms on 5 November.

These farmers and clusters are being assisted through the Land Clearing Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture.

While officially handing over their offer letters at Korovou, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy urged all the recipients to take full advantage of this opportunity and to grow towards commercial agriculture levels for the benefit of their families and communities.

“We want you to grow your commercial agriculture venture for your benefit and for your mataqali whose resources are there to be utilized in

the nation’s interest because we are an agriculture nation and our strategic advantage lies here.

Minister Reddy elaborated that a total of 33 individuals and 20 mataqalis were being targeted to be assisted under the Land Clearing Programme whereby the Ministry would provide the resources to clear their land, free of charge.

“We will clear the bush using excavators and bulldozers, we will prepare the land using our tractors and we will give you the planting material, and you don’t have to pay a single cent,” he said.

“Our contractors are ready to mobilize their resources immediately and I want to congratulate all of you who are the recipients of this programme. Thank you because you weren’t done any favors, we didn’t do any favors for you, you deserve it you

went through a very rigorous competitive process without any favor to anyone applicant and you were chosen to be recipients because of your interest and potential,” added Hon. Reddy.

The 10 mataqalis that received their offer letters today will have 5 acres of their land cleared with the 14 individuals set to have 1.5 acres of their unutilised land cleared, respectively, with funding sourced through the Land Clearing Programme.

Minister Reddy also urged the recipients to treat their farms as a business and to refrain from requesting for more Government assistance as there were more farmers and clusters that required assistance.

“You need to grow on your own from here, treat your farms as a business and please don’t come back to Government next year asking for more because we want to assist another mataqali and other individuals through this same programme and so forth. We need to shift our focus to helping all mataqalis in the country and this is why you must consider this as assistance that will be rolled out on a one time basis.

Meanwhile, Mr. Manoa Gade of Cautata Village, Bau, Tailevu said the land clearing assistance was a welcome one which would have a huge impact on their farming development.

“I can assure that this help will not go to waste for us. We will use it to grow and expand our farms as this is a big opportunity for those of us who have been fortunate enough to be selected to receive it and I thank the Ministry of Agriculture for the work being done to grow the sector,” said Mr. Gade.

A total of 71 acres of unutilized, uncultivated and overgrown land within the Central Division is earmarked to be cleared, prepared and used for agricultural purposes under the Land Clearing Programme.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE PROGRAMME ASSISTANCE ROLLED OUT



Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with the recipients of the Women in Agriculture Program package.

A total of 20 women’s clusters in the Western Division, have received their Women in Agriculture (WIA) programme packages as part of efforts to upscale the participation and profitability of agricultural ventures managed by women.

While receiving their packages, the successful recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture’s WIA programme were acknowledged for their keen interest and contributions towards the development of the agriculture sector.

Speaking at the handing over ceremony in Nailaga, Ba, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said with the 14% demographic of women farmers, as founded from the Agriculture Census, it was evident that these agriculture households were led soundly by female decision-makers, and had become leading agri-based entrepreneurial ventures in their respective communities.

Minister Reddy acknowledged the important

role that women played in agriculture expansion in Fiji, highlighting the rapid expansion of the sector and its correlating export statistics.

“In 2020 our agriculture exports, fresh and chilled produce increased by 14% in volume and 24% in value, this year during the first six months compared to the same period last year, our exports went up by 8%. So we are very encouraged and note the defining role played by women farmers in this leap in export that we had seen last year and this year,” he said.

“We studied some of the women farmers and noted that they are quite decisive, they are quite entrepreneurial and they are a symbol and example in their areas and we decided that we would revamp the existing women in agriculture programme also known as the Cottage Industry Programme.

Minister Reddy shared that prior to this year, programmes such as the WIA and others were not advertised, adding that this year was the first time programmes were advertised online.

“So this year, we decided that all the programmes we have in the Ministry, we will advertise so that everyone has the opportunity to decide whether they would want to apply and I am very happy to see such a massive response. Over 8,000 applications were received for all the programmes which were advertised,” said Hon. Reddy.

“Today we are very proud to celebrate the recipients of the Women in Agriculture programme

in Fiji. We received over 990 online applications for the \$200,000 allocation that we have and we are providing assistance to about 54 recipients throughout Fiji.

Minister Reddy told the recipients that the assistance given to them should boost their agribusinesses and lay the foundations for further expansion.

“So we are very happy to provide this assistance worth \$200,000 and we do hope that this becomes a catalyst to expand your agriculture venture in whatever you do, whether you are in floriculture, nursery, whether you are in horticulture or a root crop farmer whatever agri-based venture you have, we want you to continue to expand.

Meanwhile, Mrs Vani Rokobeta Tera, President of Beautiful Bloom cluster praised Government for the continued support shown towards developing women in agriculture, acknowledging the interventions and advice given by the Ministry of Agriculture to help women excel in their businesses.

“We are very fortunate to be chosen to receive this assistance, it shows the importance being placed on the contribution made by women towards agriculture, be it in floriculture, horticulture or in whatever farming activity we women concentrate on, we’re just happy,” she said.

Mrs Tera has also challenged women around the country to utilise any and all available land for agricultural purposes, whether they chose to take up

floriculture or crop farming, the onus was on them to use their time wisely and take up farming.

Eleven women’s clusters in Ba, three in Nadroga/Navosa, and six in Rakiraki received the packages.

Each individual member of the women’s clusters Beautiful Bloom, All in Bloom, Christian Centre Women’s Group, Muanivaju Women’s Group, Yanuya Women’s Cluster Group, Tavua’s Women Cluster Group, and Home of Flowers in Rakiraki will each receive a \$500.00 WIA kit which includes 1 roll of shalun cloth, 1 water tank, hose pipe, water cans, wheelbarrow and planting materials to boost their agriculture activities.

VATUMALI VETERINARY CLINIC COMMISSIONED



Commissioning of the Vatumali Veterinarian Clinic by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

More than 200 livestock farmers of the upper Sigatoka Valley can now access basic veterinarian services at the Keyasi Government Station, in the highlands of Navosa.

This follows the commissioning of the Vatumali Veterinarian Clinic by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, bringing these services which was previously only offered in Lawaqa, Sigatoka closer to livestock farmers in the upper valley.

Minister Reddy said the notion behind the setting up of the Vatumali clinic was to ensure that service delivery was maintained.

“We had always intended to bring this service closer to the people of Vatumali, it required a lot of forward planning and resource mobilization and we’re glad to finally be able to commission this veterinary clinic here for the people here in the upper Sigatoka Valley.

“We want to continue on this momentum that we’ve gathered with respect to agriculture expansion and growth and the benefits of this agricultural growth will be witnessed as it cascades down and is distributed towards everyone in the country, so that in the same shift, everyone of us can grow together,” he said.

“That’s the agricultural development model that we have and in this agricultural equation, livestock will continue to play a very important role,” added Hon. Reddy.

He also elaborated that through the delivery of such veterinary services to farmers, it signified the continued emphasis placed on strategies to curb the importation of livestock products into the country for local consumption.

“We’re not just here to commission this veterinary clinic but to also reinforce the production systems in place and to also give you that push and leverage to expand agriculture.

“We have a strategic advantage in terms of our livestock sector and today we are here to commission a livestock clinic so that none of you, if you have any problems with your livestock, have to go down to Sigatoka,” said Hon. Reddy.

“The clinic is here, whether it is for a small injury, or castration or if need be, your animal requires surgery, it can be scheduled and will be conducted right here in Vatumali, our Veterinarian will come here to operate on your animals in the shortest time frame possible, at no cost to you,” he said.

Meanwhile, Timoci Naivua of Namacawa settlement who was the first client to purchase animal medicine from the clinic expressed his appreciation for the hindsight in bringing this most basic of animal health services closer to the highland farmers of Navosa.

“This has saved me a lot of money, before if I wanted to get medicine for my animals I would have to travel all the way to Sigatoka, this saves me time, energy and money and I am very happy that the Ministry of Agriculture has brought this clinic to us here at Keyasi,” said Mr. Naivua.

DAWASAMU AGRICULTURE STATION COMMISSIONED



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy with ministry staff and stakeholders during the commissioning of Dawasamu Agriculture Station.

The Ministry of Agriculture’s Dawasamu Station which suffered major structural damages during Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016 was commissioned on 15 November.

The newly commissioned Dawasamu Agriculture Station and Quarters was designed according to Category 5 building standards to withstand future natural disasters of the same ferocity.

While officiating at the commissioning of the station in Dawasamu, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said Government’s focus remained on bringing services closer to all Fijians, regardless of geographical location.

“While you’re right in the interior here or any farmer for that matter, even if they’re situated in the maritime zone, and are far away from the main business centre’s, you are not forgotten, you will never

be forgotten," he said.

"Our presence here is in the form of our officers and the services available for your fellow Fijians living in urban areas will also be available here for your ease of access.

Minister Reddy said the commissioning of the station and the quarters was also a sign of renewed vigor from the Ministry's perspective and an indicator of its commitment to service delivery.

Meanwhile, he also called on all farmers in the

district of Dawasamu to maximize on the Ministry's presence by taking advantage of the opportunities that abound for Fiji's local agriculture sector and to produce for the increasing demand of local agricultural produce in all markets, particularly for the export market.

Minister Reddy also highlighted the silver lining to COVID-19, which was the mass return of Fijians to agriculture based activities, seeing an influx of a back to rural movement from Fijians whose livelihoods

were greatly affected by the pandemic.

"Over the last 18 months, we have seen a massive movement of people, instead of a rural to urban drift, it was a back to rural movement because people realized that through agriculture, they had a secure source of livelihood and this is why I stress the strategic advantages that are available within the sector and COVID has revealed that if you take up agriculture, you have control over your life and your future," he said.

NAMEKA AGRICULTURE STATION COMMISSIONED



Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy, PS Agriculture Vinesh Kumar with the villagers inside Nameka Agriculture Station.

165 farming households from 20 localities within the district of Tai Vugalei, Tailevu can now access crop and livestock extension services from the newly commissioned Nameka Agriculture Station.

After a lapse of 50 years, the Nameka Agriculture station, which was established in the 1980s, was reopened by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, bringing basic agriculture services closer to farmers in the district, who now no longer need to travel to Korovou Town to access the same.

Speaking to villagers and farmers of Tai Vugalei in Tailevu on 11 November, Hon. Reddy highlighted the need to raise the quality of living for Fijians

living in rural communities, urging them to utilise all available resources to raise their standard of living.

"You have a vast amount of resources readily available and you should utilize this properly for the future of your children and grandchildren and you must invest in them," Dr. Reddy said.

"We can do better if we work together, you as farmers and us as the Ministry of Agriculture, in trying to achieve a common goal for the betterment of all involved within the sector," he said.

He said the commissioning of the station was also a promise of service delivery to the farmers of Tai Vugalei district.

"It also portrays our stance on our vision to

"Grow Beyond". We're growing beyond internal challenges that once delayed our service delivery but that will now be a thing of the past for people here in Nameka. Additionally, we also place great emphasis on staff welfare to provide a conducive environment for the development of the sector.

Minister Reddy also shared that the growth and development of any country depended largely on the agriculture sector, considering the strategic advantage held by it, as food security was paramount especially during trying times like COVID-19.

Turaga-ni Koro of Nameka village Manoa Gukinasau said the commissioning of the agriculture station was an auspicious occasion for all members of their community and surrounding villages and settlements, as they no longer had to travel to Korovou to access agricultural services.

"We're very happy to have these services restored after a lapse of 50 years and we would like to thank and appreciate the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture for resuming such services to village dwellers like us," he said.

"The opening of this agriculture station will surely boost the morale of farmers here, especially for the farmers of Tai Vugalei as they are eager to expand their farming to another level and work with the Ministry to enhance their dreams," said Mr. Gukinasau.

The villages of Nameka, Vatukarasa, Natuva and Tonia will be served at the station along with the surrounding settlements of Namoto, Vunisei, Wainicibi, Daiikesa, Lutunabuli, Matainabasaga, Naitiqatiga, Naiyala, Nakua, Nalikodrau, Naseva school compound, Navunidrara, Coloi, Nasogo, Navau, Uluiravo and Wainikai.



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE JOINS THE FIGHT AGAINST BRIBERY



Officials from FICAC and Ministry of Agriculture during the launch of the Anti Bribery Campaign at the Agriculture Headquarters in Raiwaqa.

The Ministry of Agriculture has become the first Ministry to join the “I don’t accept bribes campaign currently underway.

The launch together with the badging ceremony was of remarkable significance as it demonstrated the high level committed leadership that embodies the core values of good governance with Senior Management being committed to transparency, integrity and accountability as well as setting the tone for younger Officers.

‘Don’t Accept Bribes’ was the message relayed by Ministry of Agriculture Head of Human Resources Development and Services, Mr Ben Chand at the launch of the Anti-Bribery Campaign with the Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) on 16 November.

Mr. Chand said the campaign had begun in December last year and was a joint effort by FICAC and the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption Project where they worked around the theme of ‘I don’t accept bribes’.

“We have already begun two training programs with the staff within the Ministry. However, today we would like to get this message out and support the cause with the team from FICAC together with the Leadership Team in the Ministry of Agriculture,” he said.

Mr. Chand added the message to the Team within the Ministry was to be aware of their contractual obligations under the positions they held in the Ministry Fiji Independent Commission Against Corruption (FICAC) Manager Corruption Prevention Ms Kolora Naliva acknowledged the proactive support and steps taken by Ministry of Agriculture and stated that bribery is one of the commonest forms of corruption, often hidden from the view because it is illegal, unlawful and immoral.

Ms Naliva stated that to win the war against corruption there is a need to have concerted efforts and cooperation of the citizenry and fighting bribery and corruption must be a priority on each and every civil servants agenda.

“Your initiative today demonstrates high level committed leadership that embodies the core values of good governance. Direction starts at the top. Leadership can make good governance become a reality. When senior management is committed to transparency, integrity and accountability, and lives by these standards, it will set the tone for staffs,” Ms Naliva said.

Ms Naliva stated as civil servants they have two important tasks at hand, that is, being a person of integrity and having the civic duty to report matters of bribery and corruption to FICAC.

In her final message to the senior management team of the Ministry, Ms Naliva further stated “the message that we are trying to put across to you is that integrity must be inculcated and ingrained into your minds and lives, and that of every other civil servants and citizens in this country.

Integrity must live within and you must be committed to it. By being a person of integrity, you show the type of character or the type of person that you are”.

She encouraged the Senior Management to take pride in their organization and to take a stand against corruption and don’t accept to bribes.

The Senior Management and Officers of Ministry of Agriculture have undergone two sessions of the anti-bribery trainings conducted by the Corruption Prevention Department.

The training will also be extended to all Offices of the Ministry across the country. The “I don’t accept bribes campaign is a joint initiative by FICAC and the United Nations Pacific Regional Anti-Corruption (UN-PRAC) Project aimed at educating civil servants about the evils of bribery and enlisting their support to create workplaces with zero tolerance to bribery and corruption.

\$58K MADE FROM AUCTION OF USED VEHICLES AND FARM IMPLEMENTS

Almost \$58k was made from an auction held at Koronivia Research Station on the 27th of November.

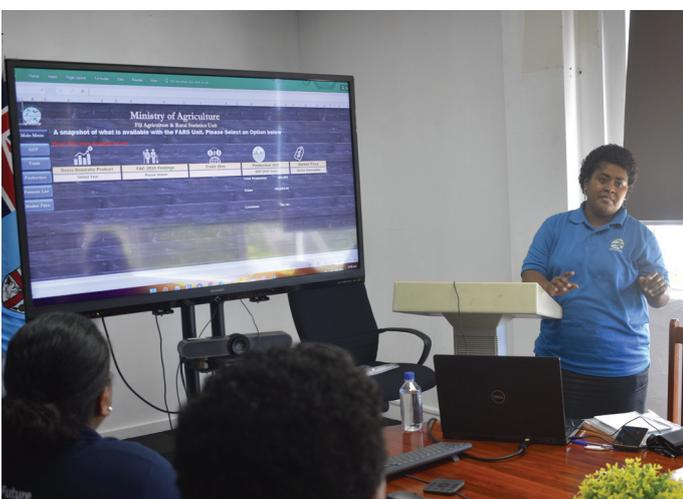
A total of 20 items including vehicles, machines and implements were auctioned off where \$57,759.10 VIP was earned for the Government.

The Government Auctioneer, Mr Jerry Cataki, together with staff from the Fiji Procurement Office, Koronivia Research Station, PS Agriculture and Assets Team witnessed the event.



Ministry staff and bidders at the auction at KRS.

EP&S DIVISION MEETS FOR 1ST QTR REVIEW



Highlights from the EP&S 1st Quarter Meeting at HQ.

The status of agro tourism and agri business, farm level data and profile, and budget utilization for the Economic Planning and Statistics (EP&S) Division of the Ministry were some areas discussed during the Division's first quarter meeting.

The Division also took the opportunity to launch its 2021-2022 Business Plan. Divisional Head and Chief Economist, Ms Sera Bose said the Plan highlighted detailed activities of each unit within the Division and strategic targets, the basis of its

operations.

"It's important to be part of this discussion as it allows us the opportunity to review our performance during the quarter," she said.

The EP&S team also heard presentations on macro indicators, performance and recommendations from the Statistics Team; Commercial Agriculture Development Program framework and the evaluation plan for capital programs from the Projects and Budget team, Codex

overview, planned activities and status from the AgTrade Team; Strategic Development Goals mid-term review with methodology and work plan from the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, amongst other topics.

Ms Bose thanked her team for the work undertaken in the first quarter and encouraged further team work to ensure that all timelines were met.

PHOTO GALLERY



Minister - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy presents Women in Agriculture package to a recipient in the West.



PS Agriculture Vinesh Kumar with staff during the auctioning at Koronivia Research Station



Rice Farmers training at Vunivutu Village in partnership with Ministry of Agriculture, Fiji Rice and UNDP.



Team ADRA and MoA Staff for C4C monitoring.



Staff from the North.



Central staff pose for a photo at Dawasamu Agriculture Station.



Ministry staff, participants and invited guests of the floriculture training conducted at Burebasaga village.



SAO NN & team hosts Information Team for dinner