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## STRAY ANIMALS, THREATEN AGRICULTURE EXPANSION: DR REDDY



Launching of the Operation Vesu Manumanu at MoA Headquarters.

In the last three years, the Ministry of Agriculture captured a little over 2,700 animals with those captured this year numbering 217 animals.

This was revealed by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, the Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy at a press conference on 25 October where he announced the launching of 'Operation Vesu Manumanu', a joint inter-agency exercise aimed at trapping stray animals in public places.

"Stray animals have now become a threat to agriculture expansion. People are losing their crops to stray animals. Road users have lost their lives from road fatalities because of stray animals on the roads.

"Since the borders will open soon we want our highways to be safe. With the festive season approaching there will be influx of families traveling on the road and we along with our stakeholders want to ensure the safety of these commuting families," the Minister said.

He said despite the Ministry of Agriculture assisting in capturing and impounding stray animals, the problem continued.

"The main reason is that animal owners are not responsible and do not take ownership of their animals," the Minister said.

"If one looks at the Ministry of Agriculture complaints database the issue of stray animals tops the statistics. Apart from dogs and wild pigs, stray cattle and horses are of the greatest concern for our farming communities.

"In 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture officially received 620 complaints of stray animals, whilst in 2020 we received 720 complaints and this year so far we have received 738 complaints. The complaints are increasing every year," he said.

The Minister explained the complaints included damaging of crops, trespassing properties, causing harm to other livestock,

animals on the road and contributing to road fatalities, and spreading of diseases such as TB.

He added, over the years, the Ministry of Agriculture had been criticized for not doing enough to address the issue of stray animals.

"In fact, we should not be directly dealing with the stray animals. Ministry of Agriculture through its regulatory unit facilitates two animals' acts to counter the issue of stray animals; the Pounds Act and the Brands Act."

Under the Pounds Act, Dr Reddy said, the Ministry establishes, runs and maintains livestock pounds around Fiji. The Ministry, he adds, provides short-term holding facilities for impounding stray animals.

"Ideally, under the provision of the Pounds Act, the farmers or property owners whose farm or property had been trespassed or damaged, have to catch the animals and bring it to the pound themselves. The Ministry does not go out and catch the animals on your property.

"However, recently we have set up a Stray team within our Regulatory division to assist farmers in capturing animals and impounding it. It's an expensive, very laborious and risky exercise," the Minister explained.

Dr Reddy said another challenge was the legal identification of animals where under the Brands Act, every cattle and horse a person kept had to be branded.

"Even if you have one animals, you need to have it branded. Brands allow for a quick animal identification so that your valuable animals can be traced back and returned to you in the event of theft."

He said despite several awareness in the villages and communities there was not much success as complaints of stray animals were received on a daily basis across Ministry of Agriculture stations.

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## 2021 WORLD FOOD DAY CELEBRATIONS COMMEMORATED



World Food Day celebrations at Bilalevu

Fiji joined the global community in commemorating the 2021 World Food Day on 16 October, which coincided with the 76th Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) anniversary.

With the theme: “Our Actions are our future. “Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment and Better Life,” the event also provided an avenue to review and identify the impact that COVID-19 had effected on global agri-food systems.

Speaking at the commemorative event today in Bilalevu, Sigatoka, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the celebrations focused on raising awareness on the need for collaborative action across all sectors to make agri-food systems sectors more efficient and sustainable.

“Today’s celebrations therefore provide an

ideal platform to emphasize the importance of agri-food systems transformation, connecting it to people’s daily lives, and particularly how this will affect the physical and economic accessibility to quality nutritious food.

“We intend to showcase how every food journey is interconnected with our Agri-Food Systems. This journey recognizes how our Food Heroes; the Farmer, the Food Transporter, the Exporter, the Market Vendor, Factory Worker, Chef, Family Members, you, me and our friends influence the way you and I choose to consume food. Coincidentally, the relevant food choices we make consequently affects human health, animal health and planetary health,” he said.

With the COVID-19 pandemic placing immense pressure on Agri Food systems in Fiji and around the region, this brought forth disruptions in food systems and have further exacerbated the fragility of systems and

livelihoods.

“Here at home, the Fijian Government has repositioned itself and developed policy measures to contain the spread of the virus, stabilize functioning Agri-Food Systems and develop medium to long term policies that will build resilience to vulnerabilities, shocks and stresses.

“Amidst the pandemic, the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture embarked on implementing a Food Security Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan. This plan effectively addressed the food and nutrition security of Fijians around the country including those in the urban and peri-urban centers who realized the shocks much earlier,” said Hon. Reddy.

He also elaborated on the Home Gardening programme that was initiated to ensure that every Fijian family had access to a reasonable supply of fresh and nutritious vegetable during the pandemic, whereby the Ministry of Agriculture distributed over 135,709 seed packages, with each seed package containing at least 4 vegetable commodities which equates to around 542,836 individual seed packs.

“This was distributed to more than 90,000 households largely in urban and peri-urban areas.

“The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the continuous challenges imposed by climate change, highlights the need to work together as value-based food supply chains that promotes local food policies and agri-enterprises that work together to maximize value for all – whether it be the producer, processor, distributor or the end consumer.

“Everyone needs to seize every opportunity to create a positive impact on our Agri Food systems ensuring that no one goes to bed hungry,” he said.

## MINISTRY PLANTS FRUIT TREES TO COMMEMORATE FIJI DAY



Fruit Tree planting at Sawarua, Lokia in Rewa.

The Ministry of Agriculture continued its fruit tree planting programme by planting select fruit trees at the settlement of Sawarua, Lokia in Rewa on Fiji Day.

The fruit tree planting programme was organized as part of the Ministry’s annual Fiji

Day celebratory commemoration, which began last year with the #IPlanted50 campaign whereby 50 fruit trees were planted in 50 villages around the country in 2020, with a similar programme rolled out this year but with 51 fruit trees to be planted in 51 villages.

While speaking to members of yavusa Vulagi, who had settled at Sawarua Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the fruit tree planting programme was intended to complement the assisted community’s current food systems with fruit bearing trees to improve their nutrition security.

He said that though rural and maritime communities had a steady source of staple foods like dalo, cassava and yams, there was always a shortage of nutritional foods available to them.

“While villages may have access to food, it may not necessarily be a balanced diet, and we want our villagers, our people who live there to have not only food security, but nutritional security as well.

“Balanced growth, fitness and wellness is important. Our mental growth is also vital for our overall success and progress,” he said.

“All in all, this project aligns well with a number of the Ministry of Agriculture’s strategic objectives, most critical of which is securing the food and nutrition security of our citizens,” added Minister Reddy.



Meanwhile, Mr. Fredy Dumarú who spoke on behalf of the yavusa Vulagi, said the agricultural development advice and support shared by Minister Reddy during the talanoa session was a welcomed one.

“Thank you for visiting and choosing our community here in Sawarua, and our

yavusa Vulagi is fortunate to have heard from you regarding the areas that we need urgent assistance with regarding our farming, and the assurances given for the development of our growing community,” said Mr. Dumarú.

Additionally, home gardening packages were also distributed to households to further

enhance their food and nutritional security and complement traditional food sources.

Fruit trees ranging from rambutan, jackfruit, dawa, kumquat, cocoa and coconut was planted as part of the programme today at Sawarua.

## MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FDB SIGN MOU TO PROMOTE EXPANSION OF COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE



Acting PS Agriculture - Mr. Vinesh Kumar (left) and FDB Chief Executive Officer Mr. Saud Minam during the MoU signing.

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Fiji Development Bank (FDB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 8 October to promote the expansion of commercial agriculture and encourage the use of banking services to farmers and agro-processors.

The Acting Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Dr Vinesh Kumar said the signing of the Commercial Farmers Equity Package (CFEP) marked an important milestone in the long-standing partnership between the Ministry and FDB.

He said CFEP was designed to provide financial assistance to commercial farmers and agro processors in the form of equity and the package targeted producers and processors of agricultural produce whose intention was to invest and grow their agricultural venture.

“CFEP aims to improve farm mechanization, agriculture infrastructure support, agro-processing infrastructure and equipment. The Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and FDB came together to draft an agreement on how to formalize this partnership of improving Commercial Farmers Equity and subsequently increase the Agriculture Sector’s contribution to the economy,” he said.

Dr Kumar was confident that the

partnership between the two parties would grow from strength to strength and the Agreement would be a bridge to promote greater economic opportunities through agriculture investment.

“This partnership will continue to support each other through this agreement which, consequently realizes the collective aspirations or our people through commercial farming, improve agricultural resilience, provide economic opportunities, environmental sustainability and food and nutrition security in Fiji,” he added.

FDB Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Saud Minam said the Bank was delighted to partner with the Ministry on this initiative.

“Under this programme, which is an initiative of the Government to provide financial stimulus in the form of equity to 30 commercial farmers and agro-processors in improving farm mechanization, agricultural infrastructure, and agro-processing infrastructure support and equipment,” said Mr Minam.

The Ministry will provide an incentive grant in the form of equity that would meet 20per cent of the total investment cost, while FDB will provide the other 80per cent financial solution, the CEO said.

“This Package will help strengthen the food system, exports, create new market opportunities

for farmers and processors, and help make supply chains more resilient to economic and natural shocks such as those caused by the pandemic and climate change,” he said.

He added the programme would support targeted farmers increase exports, household livelihood, income quality, and increase employment for Fijians in the long term.

Mr Minam thanked the Government and the Ministry for allowing FDB to partner for this initiative with agriculture being the Bank’s mandated focus sector.

“Farmers whose farm sizes are five acres and above and are registered entities as well as those who are producers and processors of crop and livestock commodities, can access loans from FDB up to \$250,000 with the Ministry providing an equity contribution of 20per cent,” said Mr Minam.

There are nine categories of borrowing entitlement where a grant of 20per cent of the total project cost will be paid by the Ministry and a loan from FDB of a maximum of 80per cent of the total project cost will be paid by the customer.

The Ministry will provide FDB a list of approved applicants where the Bank will then assess the applications using its own credit assessment criteria.

# DRASA JOHNSON VEGETABLE FARMERS' COOPERATIVE MODEL FARM COMMISSIONED



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy (2nd from right) and EU Ambassador H.E. Sujiro Seam (3rd from right) with Dialogue Fiji Director - Mr. Nilesh Sharma (1st from right) with MoA Officials at Drasa Model Farm.

The Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, together with the European Union (EU) Ambassador for the Pacific and to Fiji, His Excellency Sujiro Seam commissioned the EU-funded Drasa Johnson Vegetable Farmers' Cooperative Model Farm.

The Drasa Model Farm which was supported through an EU funded project titled "Building Community Resilience to Climate Change through Civil Society Action", was implemented by Dialogue Fiji in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.

Through the project, a Hydroponic system, a Drip Irrigation system and a small nursery have been set up on the Drasa Model Farm to help assist farmers maintain their production during dry weather, and minimize water wastage.

Speaking at the commissioning, Minister Reddy said that with the support from the European Union and Dialogue Fiji, a number of objectives were achieved with regards to agriculture and the improvement of people's livelihoods.

"We are able to break forth in terms of getting people on the ground to adapt new technology so that we can push the quality and push the quantity.

"There is an extent to which we can increase outputs and productivity with the status quo, beyond that, it requires technological introduction and today, we have seen this community who have been doing farming for ages, openly, who are willing to adapt this technology of using drip irrigation and hydroponics and greenhouse," he said.

"Sometimes people in the grain of society shy away from adapting new technology and it

becomes a daunting challenge for us, policy makers to bring in new technology so that we can really push the boundary, push the frontier and increase outputs," added Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy also highlighted the growth of the sector over the first six months of this year as compared to the same period last year.

"In fact, in 2020 agricultural exports were higher than 2019, in terms of volume by 16%, in terms of value by 24% - a remarkable achievement despite all the challenges we faced last year. This year, during the first six months our exports went up by 8% compared to the same period last year.

"It is time that we continue to push beyond the existing boundaries and think outside the box and I am urging farmers to look at utilizing their resources year-round either through technological introduction or also through crop diversification and crop rotation," he said.

Meanwhile, His Excellency Sujiro Seam said the EU support to the Drasa Cooperative Model Farm was aligned with the Ministry of Agriculture's Strategic Development Plan, which was aimed at boosting food security and nutrition, diversifying the production of assorted fruits and vegetables, increasing farmers' household incomes, improving commercial agriculture as well as modernising agriculture and supporting climate-smart agricultural methods.

They have also generated their own seedlings on time during the main season and reduced the cost of procuring seedlings from private nurseries.

These priorities are consistent with the EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy. They contribute to the transition towards

more sustainable and resilient food systems, by reducing their environmental footprint while promoting more sustainable and healthy diets. The Drasa Cooperative Model Farm showcases setups and enables practical training for farmers using smart agriculture techniques, which have become necessary in the face of climate change", Ambassador Seam said while delivering his keynote address in Drasa.

He added that "strengthening adaptation capacities of vulnerable communities as they grapple with the impacts of climate change on soil quality, rainfall, weather patterns and pest infestation is the focus of the Building Community Resilience to Climate Change through Civil Society Action. The Drasa Cooperative Model Farm is a success story of the partnership between the EU, Government and Non-Governmental Organisations".

The ten members of the Drasa model farm are now actively involved in assorted vegetable farming all year round. Currently, the cooperative continues to supply the Lautoka market and has contractual agreements signed with agro-marketing companies, middlemen and hotels. The cooperative produces assorted fruits and vegetables.

The three-year 'Building Community Resilience to Climate Change through Civil Society' project has a budget of €680,000 (nearly FJD 1.7 million). It is funded by the EU and implemented by a consortium of local civil society organisations including Rotary Pacific Water for Life Foundation, Dialogue Fiji and Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding, which collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways and Environment.



## SUPER SEED PLANT HOUSE NURSERY COMMISSIONED



*Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy commissions Super Seed Plant House Nursery.*

A \$17k nursery belonging to 27-year-old Visneel Vikash Chand of Maro, Sigatoka was commissioned on 11 October, by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

When addressing farmers of Maro, Sigatoka and neighbouring areas, Minister Reddy said the onus to expand towards fully commercializing the greenhouse nursery remained with Mr. Chand.

“We are here to commission a project by a young farmer. This nursery is the beginning of the establishment of a corporate farmer, a commercial farmer and we want Visneel’s investment in this nursery to become an example for all farmers in this area.

“We believe that Visneel, through his nursery, will support other farmers with cheap, low-cost, low priced seedlings and we want other

farmers to learn from Visneel to establish their own nurseries, all you need is some shalon cloth and timber, from your own farm maybe and from there, you can grow,” said Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy also elaborated that the Ministry had rolled out a number of development programmes earmarked at fully capitalizing the farmer’s capabilities, be it in the livestock or crop sectors.

He also said that the demand for fresh produce continually grew and that farmers needed to consistently meet the demands from the market, especially with the soon to be reopened tourism industry.

Hon. Reddy also challenged farmers of Maro to grow rice to help reduce the current import bill.

Meanwhile, Super Seed Plant House Nursery owner, Mr. Visneel Vikash Chand thanked the

Ministry of Agriculture for the shalon cloth and pine post assistance for his nursery as well as the technical advice provided by the Ministry’s officers.

“I am a Bachelor of Agriculture student from Koronivia, and I thought to take up agriculture on a full-time basis because white-collar jobs can only earn so much, but through agriculture, I can earn so much more than what I would’ve earned taking up white-collar employment,” said Mr. Chand.

“I chose to set up this nursery because I found that a lot of the farmers in this area travel all the way to Nadi, even up to Ba to get seedlings and so I decided to start my nursery business to help these farmers to save on their travelling costs and I have discovered the potential in this business venture,” he added.

## FIRST ‘LIVE CALF’ CESAREAN SURGERY FOR THE NORTHERN DIVISION

First ‘live calf’ cesarean surgery for the Northern Division with a very happy farmer with both calf and cow doing well.

A rare occurrence as usually majority come for assistance when the calf is dying or already dead.



*MoA staff SVO Dr. Beato Lenoa (left) who conducted the cesarean surgery and Sumeet Singh (right) at the farmer’s residence*



## RFMF OFFICERS UNDER TAKE MUSHROOM FARMING



*RFMF personnel planting substrates*

Thirty-five Republic of Fiji Military Officers (RFMF) harvested their first lot of mushrooms on 29 October after successfully completing a two-day training.

RFMF Chief of Staff Operations, Lt. Col. Lepani Damuni said the COVID-19 lockdown in April had postponed this training and when the restrictions were finally lifted, he reached out again to the Ministry of Agriculture to request that it continued as initially planned.

is something that the soldiers can look forward when they walk out of this gate when they turn 55," Lt Col Damuni explained.

The Chief of Staff Operations added mushroom farming was similar to smart farming where it was less strenuous but high output.

As part of their training, the officers held a practical session.

"We dug a small plot in front of my quarters where we planted 71 substrates and after ten days

"We were given two days to conduct this mushroom training. Initially, there were 68 RFMF personnel that gave their names for training but when it started, there were only 35. I still think that's a good number," he said.

He added mushroom farming was still one of the best ways for soldiers to continue further when they retired from the Military.

"It's what we call here, 'Military for Life' concept; when we retire, we have something to fall back on. So, this

we will harvest. That will be on October 29," Lt Col Damuni said.

Training Facilitator and Ministry of Agriculture Principal Research Officer – Landuse, Dr Tekini Nakidakida explained the mushroom training was under the Juncao Technology Program which was basically a type of versatile grass.

One of the objectives of the Juncao Technology project, Dr Nakidakida added, was to turn this versatile grass into powder and use it to grow mushrooms, rather than to cut down trees to grow mushrooms.

"Mushrooms have a short term lifecycle. It's very high value and it can create a huge impact on the livelihoods for our rural people or our most vulnerable, especially in this changing climate. People may not have land to grow their crops or they might have land, but it might be degraded land or saline, with very high salt. So in a very small unit area, you do not need soil to grow mushrooms; all you need is that substrate. Families can earn what those with big farms earn," he said.

In terms of the training, Dr Nakidakida said the Military officers were taught the environment conditions mushrooms grew best in, how to care for it using an in-door system in a controlled environment, which was easier to manage and harvest with very little loss expected.

He said the trained officers have decided to use container production for their mushroom and were finalizing their plans on how best it was to be executed.



*Principal Research Officer Dr. Tekini Nakidakida conducting Mushroom training.*



# PHOTO GALLERY



*Fiji Day celebrations at HQ.*



*EP&S staff during the Breast Cancer Awareness in the West*



*AH&P staff during Diwali Celebrations*



*MoA Officials during the commissioning of the Super Seed Plant House.*



*Pinktober, Prophet Mohammed's Birthday and Diwali celebrations at HQ*



*A tractor, worth \$15K was handed over to the Nakovacake Cluster Farmers by the Minister Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy.*



*Rotary Labasa donated 90 masks to MoA Labasa staff.*



*MoA Senior Officials and former Staff during SAO Kadavu's funeral.  
Insert: The Late Joseph Smith.*