

AGRICULTURE *Newsletter*

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Indian Government Support Praised

Minister for Agriculture Dr Mahendra Reddy, the High Commissioner of India to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Palaniswamy Subramanyan Karthigeyan (middle), PS Agriculture Vinesh Kumar (right) with the exhibitors at the Mini-Agriculture Show and Agriculture Farm Machineries Exhibition at Sigatoka Research Station

The cordial relationship between the governments of Fiji and India was acknowledged following the successful completion of the Mini-Agriculture Show and Agriculture Farm Machineries Exhibition.

The Ministry of Agriculture, as part of its ongoing commitment to modernize the agricultural sector, worked in collaboration with the Government of India to showcase some of its Indian-made machines in an exhibition of farming excellence at its Sigatoka Research Station, Nadroga on 22 September.

While addressing the opening of the Mini-Agriculture Show and Machine Exhibitions, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said Fiji-India relations were an ongoing commitment and had grown steadily in the past years as the two countries continued to work closely to strengthen our development cooperation.

Hon. Reddy highlighted the Government of India's support following the devastation of two natural disasters, namely TC Yasa,

which saw the handing over of seven tonnes of agricultural seeds worth \$FJ1.75 million to the government of Fiji that assisted in the restoration of livelihoods of Fijian communities, and TC Winston, whereby five tonnes of vegetables worth FJ\$2.3 million were supplied by the Indian Government for TC Winston's rehabilitation efforts.

He also thanked the High Commissioner of India for their continuous support in improving Fiji's agri-food systems, which set the platform for unified growth.

Moreover, the High Commissioner of India to Fiji, His Excellency Mr. Palaniswamy Subramanyan Karthigeyan, while delivering his remarks, acknowledged the Ministry of Agriculture for being a partner in this Mini Agriculture Show and Indian Machinery Exhibition.

"We started off with the Hon. Minister with a plan to have a farm machinery exhibition and he suggested we also have a mini agriculture show," said Mr. Karthigeyan.

Mr Karthigeyan said that they would continue this partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture in strengthening our collaboration in this agriculture sector.

"We have become the largest exporter of food grains in the world and this is made possible by extensive use of farm mechanization, extensive use of science technology by introducing productive high-yield seeds, new irrigation technology, new modern farming technology and new sustainable modes of farming," said Mr Karthigeyan.

He urged the farmers to take a look at this technology and to share information to enhance their farming production.

Meanwhile, select farmers were recognized for their respective farming production and were awarded prizes for their high-yielding production levels.

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Improved Cattle Genetics Released To Farmers



Minister for Agriculture Dr Mahendra Reddy and staff with the recipients of the improved breeders

As part of ongoing efforts to improve the genetics of cattle in the nation, the Ministry of Agriculture has released 14 improved breeders that were given to 11 cattle farmers at the Nacocolevu Research Station in Sigatoka.

While officiating the introduction of the improved cattle genetics, the Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, had helped beef farmers through a variety of ongoing beef development programs, including genetic improvement programs, the building of stockyards, pasture development, and the distribution of fencing packages.

The introduction of the improved cattle breed, according to Minister Reddy, was a significant turning point in the development of the Fijian cattle industry. The Ministry of Agriculture had successfully tested new technology for transferring animal genetics, resulting in the introduction of two superior breeds to the country's livestock industry.

He said that the Ministry of Agriculture has consistently invested in research and development in an effort to preserve and enhance the quality of cattle genetics while also lowering the risk and threat to biosecurity.

"Given the ongoing biosecurity threat we introduced ET as a new way of introducing livestock genetics into the Fijian livestock sector in 2018," he said. "We have evolved from natural mating to artificial insemination, and now to Embryo Transfer Technology, or ET for short."

"The first stage of the embryo development work happened in Australia," explained Hon. Reddy. "Embryos were harvested, fertilized, and cryopreserved in the lab before being flown to Fiji with full biosecurity compliance."

Minister Reddy said the Ministry

carefully chose four superior breeds—Senepol, Brown Swiss, Wagyu, and Drought Master—based on their performance in terms of adaptability to heat stress, rapid growth and maturity, reproduction, milk production, and meat quality.

"The first phase involved the establishment of a tropically adapted elite beef and dairy herd in Fiji, which involved the Senepol breed and Brown Swiss for dairy," said Minister Reddy.

The owner of Horeb Farms Fiji, Mr. Samisoni Manewa, has praised the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts in releasing the Senepol breed to cattle farmers because he had been anticipating receiving the breed ever since learning of its introduction to Fiji. "First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to the Ministry for picking my farm as the recipient of these Senepol cattle and allowing me to purchase one. I've been eager to own this breed because our current breeders aren't doing too well. I'm confident that my cattle farm will improve thanks to this breeder, and I can expand my cattle farming," Mr. Manewa said.

In particular, Mr. Manewa said, "I would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture for the great work it is doing for us farmers. This is the way forward."

The Brown Swiss breed records an average birth weight of 45 kg, while the Senepol breed records an average birth weight of 46 kg (compared to the local breed, which weighed between 30 and 35 kg). The Brown Swiss breed also records an average first lactation milk production of 18 litres.



Pure Italian Queen Bees Reintroduced Into The Country

Twenty pure Italian Queen Bees have been reintroduced back into Fiji after 20 years.

The Queen Bees were imported into Fiji under the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Bees Project in May this year with ten queens to be kept by the Ministry of Agriculture and the remaining ten given to the Fiji Beekeepers Association.

While officiating the handing over of the improved bee genetics to bee farmers in Legalega, the Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said that the project would certainly boost honey production and income for farmers.

"Prior to the release of these bees, the stock was quarantined on Makogai Island for 90 days to assess the performance of the imported strains and to reduce the risk of introducing highly contagious diseases that could have devastating effects on the local colonies," said Minister Reddy.

"Through this release, we expect honey production to substantially increase after introducing these improved bee genetics on the bee farms.

"There is a total of 1,258 farmers in Fiji with approximately 13,906 hives, of this number 600 farms with 8,185 hives are based in the West and I am pleased to note that the total honey produced in 2021 was 255 tonnes but we can do better," said Minister Reddy.



Minister for Agriculture Dr Mahendra Reddy with the recipients of the Pure Italian Queen Bee in Legalega

During the 90-day quarantine period, it was found that the bees were very calm and easy to work with, had good foraging compared to the local cross breeds we have here in Fiji and had good brood and laying patterns which would eventually lead to a good bee population in the colony.

These 20 F1 and another 9 original Queen Bees will be released to bee farmers for gene pool improvement in the country.

Meanwhile, selected bee farmers were also given solar wax melters and wax

embossing machines to help bee farmers process bees' wax and also enable the production of wax foundation sheets respectively.

"The Ministry is anticipating that with this initiative, the farmers will upscale their production and will be able to achieve higher honey production per hive and also increase wax production which will bring additional income," said Minister Reddy.

Farmers Receive F1 Sheep To Improve On-Farm Genetics



Minister for Agriculture Dr Mahendra Reddy and Ministry staff with the recipients of the F1 sheep breed at the Nawaicoba Quarantine Station in Nadi

A total of 61 pairs of F1 Sheep breed was handed over to sheep farmers as part of ongoing efforts to improve the genetic

makeup on sheep farms in the country.

While handing over the F1 pairs at the Nawaicoba Quarantine Station in Nadi which saw the release of 122 animals, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy said the amount of sheep stock currently in the country had improved.

"Currently Fiji has a total of 982 sheep farmers with 32,061 total stock and the

sheep industry has come a long way, for example in 2009 we had around 14,000 stock amongst 818 farmers whilst in 2019

the sheep numbers were around 30,000, amongst around 900 farmers. From 2019 we had an average growth of around 3 per cent.

"So that is a substantial gain from 14,000 to 30,000 stock, this is more than double the number and farmers' numbers have increased slightly so we're very happy to see this major growth but still, we are lagging behind substantially because we are importing 4,206 tonnes of sheep/lamb meat every year," he said.

"We are spending \$48million annually on the importation of 4,206 tonnes of lamb meat, 98 per cent of all the lamb meat consumed in Fiji while 2 per cent is what we are producing so there is enormous scope to raise production," highlighted Minister Reddy.

Fiji's current formal production of

sheep meat stands at 3.64 tons/year whilst around 1.3ton is from the informal market.

The F1 Sheep is a product of cross-breeding between the Dorper and Fiji Fantastic breeds and was officially launched in 2019 whereby a total of 75 farmers in the Western Division and 32 farmers in the Northern Division benefitted from the

program.

According to the breed evaluation studies at the Ministry's Nawaicoba Quarantine Station, these crossbreeds have a higher average birth weight of 3.8kg. They also have better average body lengths. The average weaning weight of these cross-breed sheep was found to be 11.2kg.

The introduction of these cross breeds

on farms will boost the genetic make-up of the existing population and contribute to the improved performance of these animals on farms.

The improvement in the genetic make-up will create impacts such as improved weight gain, reproductive efficiency and better production performance.

World Coconut Day Commemoration In Bureiwei



Senior Research Officer Dr Rohit Lal explains the display to the public during the 2022 World Coconut Day commemoration at Matainananu Village in Bureiwei, Ra

The 2022 World Coconut Day was commemorated at Matainananu Village in Bureiwei, Ra with the theme "Growing Coconut for a Better Future and Life".

As part of these commemorative celebrations, 100 coconut seedlings were planted in Matainananu Village to mark World Coconut Day. In conjunction, ten villages in the province of Ra namely Naivoco, Matainananu, Delaiyadua, Nadogoloa, Nayavutoka, Nabukadra, Verevere, Saioko, Namarai and Naocobau will pledge to plant 1,000 seedlings each over the next six months.

While officiating during the celebrations, Permanent Secretary for Youth and Sports Mr Rovereto Nayacalevu called on the youth of the village to set clear goals and be, like a coconut tree, useful in all aspects of their lives.

"We're here to celebrate this tree of

life, the coconut tree is a tree from which a lot of things can be made, it is useful and abundant, so, like it, I ask our young people to set their vision and grow and be worthy citizens of the country," said Mr Nayacalevu.

In his statement, the Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Dr Vinesh Kumar said the main objective of celebrating the day was to create awareness about the importance of coconuts and its benefits.

"Apart from generating income, coconuts help to sustain household food and nutrition and alleviate poverty. About 120,000 of our rural population depend on the industry as their main source of food and livelihood.

"Copra remains the most traded coconut commodity in Fiji with Virgin Coconut Oil (VCO) production rapidly gaining popularity amongst rural and maritime com-

munities. In 2021, Fiji exported around \$6m worth of coconut products (in the form of VCO, Copra, Oil Cake and other products) placing coconut as one of Fiji's top 5 agricultural export commodities," said PS Kumar.

Over the past five years (2017-2021), average Coconut production was 2133.2mt (having an equivalent 19% growth rate). In 2021, the Coconut volume of production was 20,012mt and this is anticipated to improve with the support provided by the Ministry of Agriculture.

"Coconut's resilience has encouraged the Government to continue to rehabilitate and develop this industry subsequently supporting an estimated 100,000 farmers who are dependent on it for livelihood," said Dr Kumar.

He added that the Ministry of Agriculture promoted the overall development of coconut as part of a farming system whilst focusing on the rehabilitation of existing plantations.

PS Kumar also elaborated that this year, the Ministry of Agriculture had allocated a budget of \$350,000 under the Coconut Farming Program for the establishment of 1,000 hectares of coconut plantation across the coconut growing areas in Fiji.

"An additional \$1.2m is further allocated to help Fiji Coconut Millers stabilize farm gate prices of Copra with a minimum guaranteed gate price from \$1,000 to \$1,350 per ton of Copra. This is anticipated to help farmers consider reinvesting back into Copra," he said.

World Coconut Day is focused on;

1. Increasing Coconut Production, Farm Productivity and Farmers' Income,
2. Promote Value-Added Coconut Product Processing and Marketing and
3. Promote Capacity Building and Institutional Support to ensure the sustainability of development interventions.



FAOs Sub-Regional Coordinator Pays Courtesy Call To Agriculture Minister



Minister for Agriculture Dr Mahendra Reddy and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Pacific, Xiangjun Yao at the Ministry's Headquarters in Raiwaqa

The Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy received the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Pacific, Xiangjun Yao at the Ministry's Headquarters in Raiwaqa on 9 September.

Minister Reddy expressed the government's appreciation for the engagement of FAO in Fiji during Ms Yao's tenure as the FAO Sub-Regional Coordinator for the Pacific. He noted that

the country is committed to addressing priorities set by FAO as per the Ministry's 5-Year Strategic Development Plan.

During the meeting, they reviewed the work FAO had been doing in Fiji and discussed how FAO could further collaborate with the Ministry to improve the agricultural sector.

Furthermore, Minister Reddy and Ms Yao spoke about the challenges that were specific to Fiji as a Small Island Developing State, which had brought

numerous setbacks in the sector, and the way that FAO can support in ensuring food security, nutrition and capacity in Fiji bearing in mind the economy of the country.

Ms Yao said that it was a priority for the FAO to help the Fijian Government improve its agricultural sector and highlighted how important it was for the FAO and the relevant authorities to work together in order to achieve those priorities.

Ambassador Of The Republic Of Peru Pays Courtesy Call To Agriculture Permanent Secretary

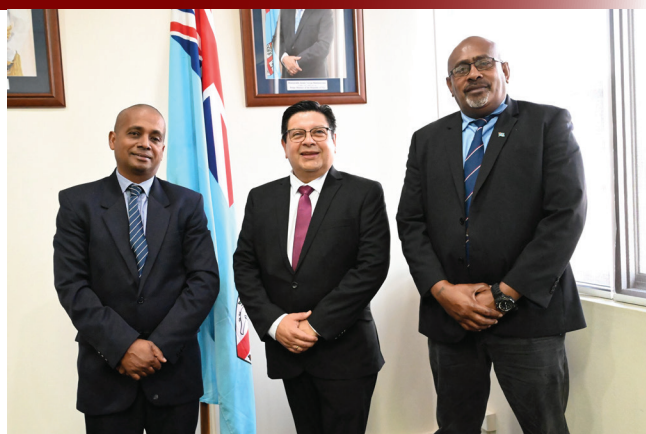
The Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Vinesh Kumar received a courtesy visit from the Ambassador of the Republic of Peru His Excellency Don Vitalino Gaspar Gallardo Valencia on 15 September.

During the visit, they discussed ways the two countries could improve the development of the agriculture sector and deliberated on possible solutions to overcome the problems faced by the industry in each of their two countries.

H.E Valencia applauded the efforts of the local agriculture sector in surpassing the \$100 million mark in the non-sugar

agriculture export earnings which was briefly explained by PS Kumar.

Areas of mutual interest and benefit were discussed during the meeting with opportunities for information sharing between the countries to further expand upon the development of the respective agriculture sectors.



PS Agriculture Vinesh Kumar, the Ambassador of the Republic of Peru His Excellency Don Vitalino Gaspar Gallardo Valencia and Head of Finance Mr Sikeli Baleisuvu

PHOTO GALLERY



Prime Minister - Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama with Assistant Minister - Viam Pillay (1st from left), PS Agriculture and Senior Officials in the North during PM's visit



Participants of training on Improving the quality of projects submissions



Ministry farewells SAO Cakaudrove Ratu Ilisoni Banuve



World Coconut Day celebrations in Matainananu village, Ra



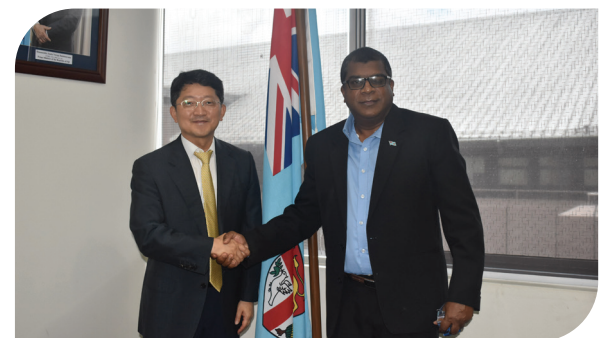
Minister commissioned coconut orchards for the village of Nawamagi along Sigatoka's East Bank



Dr. Om, a footrot expert from the University of Sydney, field visit assisted by AH&P staff at a farm in Nadi.



Goat Ultrasound Trial for Pregnancy at SRS with PHD student Amy who is working with ACIAR assisted by Dr. Beato & Staff.



Korean Ambassador His Excellency Young-kyu Park pays courtesy visit to MoA