



Agriculture NEWSLETTER



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AGRICULTURE SHOWS 2020 A SUCCESS: PS



The Agriculture Shows were all a success and I thank all the staff who made this possible, said Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Mr Ritesh Dass.

"The Agriculture Show has been part of this Ministry and while the initial thinking was to postpone the event to next year due to COVID-19, we decided we would go ahead precisely because of COVID-19 and the impact it's had on our fellow Fijians," he said.

"In fact, the Agriculture Show was exactly what we needed at this time and I really must thank all our staff from senior management down to the divisional offices that worked long hours to plan this event."

Mr. Dass also thanked the senior Cabinet Ministers and the Speaker of the House who took time out of their busy schedules to officiate at the Shows.

The Shows was officially launched by the Attorney-General Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum on 15th October in Syria Park, Nausori for the Central/Eastern Division that culminated with the World Food Celebration on 16th October.

The World Food Day commemoration was officiated by the Minister for Health and Medical Services Hon. Dr. Ifereimi Waqainabete.

The Show then travelled to Vanua Levu where it was held in Labasa on the 21st and 22nd of October and opened

by Minister for Fisheries Hon. Semi Koroilavesau.

A week later, it moved to the Western Division where it was held at Koroivolu Park, Nadi on 28th and 29th October with the National Show on 30th October with the highlight being the announcement of the National Farmers Awards. The Speaker of Parliament His Excellency Ratu Epeli Nailatikau officiated at the National event.

"It was encouraging to see the number of people that came down to these events and especially the interest it generated in light of the economic impact of COVID-19 in the tourism sector.

"I also acknowledge the participation of farmers at the Agriculture Shows and thank them also for their time," Mr. Dass said.

The Permanent Secretary also acknowledged the sponsorship of companies that donated prizes for the Farmers Awards.

"I must also specially thank the companies who came forward to donate items as part of the prizes to farmers.

"Vinaka Vakalevu for your kind contributions. I have no doubt these items will be of great use to the farmers who won these as part of their Awards."

The theme for the 2020 Agriculture Shows was 'Grow, Nourish, Sustain, Together: Our Actions are Our Future'.

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AGRICULTURE SECTOR CONTINUES TO STAMP ITS MARK IN THE FIJIAN ECONOMY: DR. REDDY



Yaqona being dried out in the sun, ready to be sold to its targeted market

The Agriculture Sector continues to record its positive and upward trend following the recent release of the 2019 National Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the official release once again demonstrated the sector's significant role to growing the Fijian economy.

"It's fantastic news indeed to know that the agriculture sector achieved positive growth in 2019 compared to 2018.

"Agriculture was identified as one of the industries that contributed positively to economic growth, unfortunately, it together with other sectors were not enough to compensate for the declines recorded in

others," he said.

Dr. Reddy said the agriculture GDP, exclusive of growing sugarcane grew by 5.5percent.

"The higher real growth was attributed to yaqona and taro. Yaqona and taro contributed 29percent or \$208.2m and 7percent or \$52.9m respectively to the total agriculture GDP," he said.

He said yaqona was again identified

as a major contributor to the growth of the sector, with the commodity marked as a possible major contributor to Fiji's National GDP in the near future if production continued to increase and prices remained constant.

He said, crop commodities showed a positive GDP growth rate of 9.2percent, which excluded the growing of sugarcane. However, a decline in livestock commodities of 4percent was recorded in 2019 compared to 2018 mainly due to the impact of Brucellosis disease which affected the dairy industry.

"There was an increase in GDP contribution from 5.6percent or \$597.2m to 5.9percent or \$630.2m in 2019, exclusive of sugarcane," he revealed.

The Minister said the statistics were again proof that agriculture would cushion the global impact of the pandemic of COVID-19 and it was critically important that all attention should focus on growing this sector in the different areas, which would in turn take care of the other aspects of the economy that were lagging behind.

JAAGRITI PIGEON PEA VARIETY RELEASED



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy samples the newly released pigeon pea variety Jaagriti with Head of Agricultural Research Shalendra Prasad at Kishore Verma's Farm in Korovuto Nadi.

Fifteen years of research conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture's Research Division saw the release of the new Jaagriti pigeon pea variety in Korovuto, Nadi.

While officiating at the release of the new pigeon pea variety at Kishore Verma's Farm in Nadi on 18 September, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy highlighted the significance of the release of the new variety in regards to reducing the country's import bill on pulse crops.

greater self-reliance and enhanced food and nutrition security in the process," said Hon. Reddy.

"On average, Fiji imports about 398 metric tonnes of assorted pulses annually valued at approximately \$12.5million. It also exports on average of 44 metric tonnes of assorted pulses valued at \$0.3million," added Minister Reddy.

In 2019, 216 hectares of land was cultivated with pulse, engaging 9,600 farmers and harvested 2,240 metric

"Our agriculture sector is challenged by our dependency on imported food, low private sector participation, inadequate domestic food production and productivity and market access for our exports.

"The major challenge is to produce more of our requirements locally in-country, while providing economic opportunities,

tonnes, an increase of 430 tonnes as compared to 2018.

"Research is playing a vital role in finding answers to questions, in the process generating scientific data, which are converted to practical information for the users, and it is these users who contribute immensely to the agriculture sector," said Dr. Reddy.

Upon receiving the pulse seeds planting material, farmer Jolame Qoro of Tunalia acknowledged the contribution of the Ministry of Agriculture through the release of this new variety.

"I am very happy to receive the seeds of the Jaagriti variety, I will surely utilise this assistance and distribute the planting material once I have harvested to my fellow mataqali members so they can also plant it," said Mr. Qoro.

61-year-old farmer Kamal Chand of Solovi also thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for their untiring work in providing crop extension and research services for the benefit of farmers.

"Indeed it is a pleasing day for me and I am very grateful to the Ministry for their continued efforts to help us farmers, I have received these seeds today and I am very happy as I have 6-acres of land to plant and I will dedicate some of it to plant this pigeon pea," said Mr. Chand.

Under the Ministry of Agriculture's Strategic Priority 2: 'Increase farmer household income for sustainable livelihood' the release of the pigeon pea variety is targeted towards ensuring sustainable livelihoods.

Pulses are part of the legume family (any plants that grow from pods), but the term "pulse" refers only to the dry edible seed within the pod. Pigeon pea, cowpea, urd and mung are the most common types of pulses. Pulses are special because they have distinct health benefits apart from other legumes.

Pigeon pea (*Cajanus cajan*) also known as red gram is a perennial legume

from the family of Fabaceae (crops that produces beans/pods) Pigeon pea is one of the promising crops for drier areas of Fiji.

The green and dry peas can be cooked in many different dishes and are very nutritious, having about 20% protein per 100 grams. It also belongs to the family Leguminosae, crops that fixes atmospheric nitrogen and enriches the soil.

There are two types of pigeon pea varieties, photoperiod sensitive (seasonal) and photoperiod non-sensitive (round-year production).

A new photoperiod sensitive

variety of Pigeon pea (ICPL 96053) was introduced from International Crops Research Institute for the Semi - Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) in 2005, and has been selected to be released by the Research Division which has been named Jaagriti meaning 'To Enlighten'.

This variety is resistant to Fusarium wilt and is less infested by Maruca testicularis (pod borer) since it has lateral flowering patterns. It is high yielding with uniform pods therefore it has a lot of potential for local markets.

YASAWAS BENEFIT FROM VILLAGE NUTRITION SECURITY INITIATIVE



Turaga ni Koro of Namatayalevu Village Apisai Raiqele and Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay plant an avocado tree at Namatayalevu Village.

Ensuring the nutritional security of Fijian villages remains a paramount undertaking for the Ministry of Agriculture.

This was reiterated during the handing over of fruit tree planting materials and home gardening packages to the three villages of Natawa in Waya district, Natia in Viwa district and Gunu in Naviti district, Yasawa by the Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay on 21 September.

Five villages from three districts in the Yasawa group of islands benefited from the Ministry of Agriculture's 'Village Nutrition Security Initiative', as planting materials were being distributed to these maritime villages during this two-day trip.

The program is one of the 16 initiatives launched earlier this year in April 20, 2020 by Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, which targets 50 villages to be supplied with fruit trees.

"Every day, you must plant, utilize all the available arable land around you to maximize your productivity by planting what you can, where you can, when you can but you must maintain your consistency," said Hon. Pillay.

"We're here to hear from you, we've noticed the challenges you face here in the maritime islands and we're committed to ensuring that nutritional security of

Fijians is not one of those challenges, and we will see how best we can address your issues," he added.

A delegation of Government officials led by the Assistant Minister for Agriculture Hon. Viam Pillay took planting materials ranging from mangoes, avocado, green pearl guava variety, home gardening packages, pineapple suckers, kumala cuttings and vertiver grass to the 5 villages of Natawa, Natia, Gunu, Namatayalevu and Nabukeru.

Under the 'Village Nutrition Security Initiative' the Ministry of Agriculture will provide a set of 3x12 fruit tree seedlings to Fijian villages to meet their nutritional requirements.

The Ministry will deliver these seedlings to the villages; and, oversee the planting and will train the community on how to support

the seedling(s), conserve the seeds and protect it from external threats.

Meanwhile, Turaga ni Koro of Natawa Village, Sisa Naibale praised Government for keeping maritime islanders in their development plans.

"Here on our island, we are surrounded by mountainous and rocky terrain and the assistance of the fruit trees that has been planted today will surely be felt by our future generations as they are the ones who will benefit greatly from this initiative, which secures their nutrition to supplement the traditional food on the island," said Mr. Naibale.

"We cannot thank the Ministry of Agriculture enough for this worthwhile program because we will surely reap its rewards in the future through our food and nutritional security on the island," Mr. Naibale added.

Similar sentiments were echoed by Namatayalevu Village headman Mr. Apisai Raiqele who said that their young and future generations would bear the fruits of this initiative.



Staff of the Ministry of Agriculture plant a mango tree at Gunu Village in Naviti district.

28,000 FARMERS PARTICIPATE IN 2020 AGRICULTURE SHOWS

The Agriculture Show is a great platform to encourage collaboration and engagement between the public and private sector and to discuss at length how best to grow and move the sector forward together, says Minister for Commerce, Trade, Tourism and Transport Hon. Faiyaz Koya.

The Minister made the comments while officiating at the Western Agriculture Show in Nadi on 28 October.

"I am told this is the third and final Agriculture Show for this year, with similar shows being hosted in the Central and Northern Divisions.

"The event here in Nadi, brings the total number of farmers who will participate in the exhibitions to 28,000," the Hon. Koya said.

He said food security was critical for a healthy and productive nation.

"We need to bring our focus back to the essentials – which is our Food system."

"We need to encourage our farmers to plant more and supply more Fijian grown food for our local and international markets," Hon. Koya said.

He said the Agriculture Show was the best meeting point to establish the

relationship encouraging farmers to plant more and supply more Fijian grown food for local and international markets.

Hon. Koya encouraged those at Koroivolu Park to visit the booths, talk to Agricultural Officers and officers from his Ministry based in Lautoka and Sigatoka to obtain the best advice on how to start a business and gather more information on the Fijian Made and Fijian Grown branding, respectively.



NORTHERN AGRICULTURE SHOW A SUCCESS

Close to 10,000 people attended the Northern Agriculture Show over two days in Labasa from 21 to 22 October 2020.

Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr. Ritesh Dass said COVID-19 screenings were conducted at the entry point into Subrail Park.

"The Northern Agriculture Show was a success not only in terms of the total number of people who crossed the gate to attend the event over the two days, but there was also strong participation from our stakeholders and farmers who were actively involved in the show. We recognize everyone for taking part and sharing information about their services and products with the people of Labasa, and a special recognition to our farmers who came with their commodities and livestock to sell, or to learn more about the Ministry's programmes and services," he said.

Mr. Dass said the Agriculture Show was also an opportune time for farmers to exchange ideas and information with other farmers as well as meet other stakeholders and discuss their wide range of products and services, and how to access these.

He said, in essence, it was a great event which was also blessed with dry and sunny weather.

"As opposed to the Central Agriculture Show which unfortunately was marred with rain in Nausori two weeks ago, the show in Labasa enjoyed clear blue skies, and it was fantastic to see people coming out in numbers, including school children who attended the Northern Agriculture Show after hours.

"The show is a great platform to showcase to students an alternative career option that can be just as rewarding as or possibly even more so than those of us working in the formal sector."

Mr. Dass also acknowledged the sponsors who chipped in to help by way of donating prizes for the Farmers Awards.

"A huge thanks goes to all our sponsors and the gifts you gave. I am confident that the farmers who are recognized appreciate the gesture and would make good use of your products on their farms."

He said the Ministry was now preparing for the last Agriculture Show which would be held in the Western Division.

"We have the final Agriculture Show this week in Nadi for three days from

Wednesday, 28 October to Friday, 30 October at Koroivolu Park and invite those of you who are in the West to mark the dates and come and see us," he said.

The Permanent Secretary said the Western Agriculture Show would be held for the first two days, while the final day on Friday (30.10.20) would feature the National Farmers Awards ceremony.

"The National Farmers Awards is the highlight of all Agriculture Shows where we pay tribute and recognize the efforts of our farmers who have contributed to the growth of our economy."

"Farmers are our main stakeholders and this is our way to recognize their hard work", he said.

Mr. Dass also acknowledged the efforts of the staff of the Ministry in the Central and Northern Divisions who worked tirelessly to organize their respective Agriculture Shows.

"A sincere thanks to all the Central and Northern teams for all your hard work including long hours that went in to pull through this event. Please note that we appreciate each and everyone's contribution to make these events possible and successful," he said.



FARMERS LAUD COMMISSIONING OF NEW STATION



The newly commissioned Koro Agriculture Station at Nasau Government Station on Koro, Lomaiviti

The newly commissioned Koro Agriculture Station which was damaged during Tropical Cyclone Winston in 2016 will encourage improved productivity of farmers on the island of Koro.

These were the thoughts shared by 49-year-old Eroti Niumataiwalu of Bau, Tailevu who plants yaqona, dalo and assorted vegetables on the island of Koro in Lomaiviti following the commissioning of the Koro Agriculture Station on 09

September by Prime Minister Voreqe Bainimarama.

Mr. Niumataiwalu who has been practicing mixed-cropping for more than 15 years said that he plants his selected crops both for his short and long term plans, highlighting the significant impact this infrastructural development will ensue for farmers on the island.

"We're happy to see these developments

on the island, and for me personally, I believe Government is doing a good job and the effects of these developments are trickling down to us the ordinary Fijians, especially us farmers."

"Government is opening doors of opportunities here on Koro Island for further development, especially during these difficult times and we are thankful for Government's investment here on the island," said Mr. Niumataiwalu.

Similar sentiments were shared by Pita Miller of Namacu Village in Koro who is farming on their Mataqali land; "This is a big step in the right direction as far as agriculture development is concerned on the island because a majority of islanders rely heavily on farming."

"The agriculture station was really badly damaged after Winston and the stations on the island were also heavily damaged, but today, after it was officially commissioned, this will provide the motivation for farmers to grow more and produce more," said Pita.

Meanwhile, Tevita Vunileba of Mudu Village in Koro said despite the global COVID-19 pandemic, Government was committed to supporting the development of rural and maritime communities.

"We're greatly indebted to Government for the major developments on the island, our new District Officer's Office, new school, health centre, and agriculture station and staff quarters will indeed boost service delivery of civil servants and I know that we will receive improved service," said Mr. Vunileba.

DESEXING EXERCISE AT MUANIVATU SETTLEMENT



Desexing held in Vatuwaqa.

The stray dog population along Muani-vatu settlement in Vatuwaqa is set to curb following a two-day spaying and de-sexing exercise conducted at the settlement.

These are parts of ongoing efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture to control the stray dog population nationwide which saw the Animal Health & Production Division conducting the two-day de-sexing exercise at the settlement from 24 -25 September.

This program was organized in collaboration with the Suva City Council following several complaints received from the residents of Muani-vatu Settlement, whereby stray dogs had become a nuisance to the public.

A survey was done to collate details of residents in the area and dog owners within the settlement, with awareness on the spaying and de-sexing exercise being conducted at Muani-vatu.

Permanent Secretary for Agriculture Ritesh Dass said the program was undertaken based on complaints received from the public, and that the hotspots where a

majority of complaints received on issues like dogs attacking people and scattering rubbish were targeted.

The public is being urged that dogs are also living beings and if you choose to be a dog owner, there are certain responsibilities, some of which include making sure dogs are kept within their compounds and ensuring the dogs are licensed annually.

"Dog owners can also get preventative medicines for their dogs like deworming tablets and vaccinations which are available either at the Ministry of Agriculture veterinary clinics or Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and private clinics," said Mr. Dass. He fur-

ther added that the public have an equally important role to play in preventing the issue in the first place, and that responsible dog ownership can significantly reduce the numbers of stray dogs and the incidence of potential zoonotic diseases.

Dog owners are advised to license their dogs, which is \$13.20 per dog and can be purchased from the Ministry of Agriculture offices and SPCA. This license is valid from January 1st to December 31st for each calendar year and is to be renewed on an annual basis.

As part of the stray animal control program, the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to have more de-sexing programs in the future in collaboration with SPCA and other charity organizations.

Meanwhile, Sailosi Naituva of Muani-vatu settlement who also brought his three year old dog for desexing shared his appreciation towards the Ministry for conducting the exercise.

Mr. Naituva said they could not sleep well at night due to the noise from dogs barking in the area and spreading rubbish around as well as attacking residents in the area; "The dog population in the settlement has increased in the past three years and this exercise was a much needed one for the settlement."

If there are stray dog problems in an area, members of the public are advised to bring this to the attention of their nearest Agriculture office.

REDDY SPEAR HEADS TREE PLANTING INITIATIVE FOR FIJI50



Taukei Lavo - Ratu Meli Saukuru with Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during the launch of the iPlanted50 initiative in the West.

The Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy led a tree planting exercise in Dratabu, Nadi that was held simultaneously across 49 other villages to commemorate Fiji's Independence Day.

The Minister acknowledged the immense contribution of past leaders from 1874 till date including those from the United Kingdom.

"Since 1970 there have been a number

of leaders in this country who contributed to the growth and development of Fiji to reach where it is today.

"Our first Prime Minister, the Hon. Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, our Statesman, our Governor Generals, our Presidents, Prime Ministers - all of them contributed to the contemporary Fiji that we see today," he reflected.

He also recognized the role of leaders outside Government, whom he said, also gave their time, resources and energy to help develop the country.

"Our leaders outside Government; leaders of NGOs; Civil Society Organisations; formal and non-formal institutions, religious institutions like the Methodist Church, Sangam, Muslim League, Sanatan Dharam - these institutions have helped shape Fiji and today after 50 years of independence we reflect on their contributions."

Dr. Reddy said the task of institutional

development would continue and it was important to ensure the security of future generations.

However, he said, the lesson that COVID-19 taught was that food and nutritional security was critical, and aligned perfectly to one of the Ministry's strategic objectives.

"I want to announce here in Dratabu Village that as part of food and nutritional strategy we will be launching, the #iPlanted50 initiative where we will be planting 50 fruit trees in 50 villages.

"It is our contribution, it is your contribution to secure food and nutritional security for our children, their children, and future generations."

Taukei Navo, Ratu Meli Saukuru thanked the Hon. Minister and his team for coming to Dratabu Village and said the village was blessed to start off the next 50 years of Independence with agriculture.

"We are so proud and blessed that one of the Government Minister Hon. Reddy is here in Dratabu.

"We have passed 50 years now. But we are looking forward to start off with agriculture. That is the life for another 50 years," Ratu Meli said.

MORE IMPROVED SEED VARIETIES READILY AVAILABLE FOR FIJI FARMERS



Senior Agriculture Officials and Executive Management with KK's Hardware representatives during the handing over of seeds in Nadi in partnership with the Australian Government supported Market Development Facility (MDF).

Farmers across Fiji now have access to more quality seed varieties which are vital for growing horticultural crops and off-season farming, says Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Minister Reddy made these comments while receiving a donation of over 600 packets of East-West brand seeds at the National Agriculture Show in Nadi on 29 October.

Over 20 varieties of seeds had been given to the Ministry's seed distribution initiative by KK's Hardware with support from the Australian Government supported Market Development Facility (MDF).

The donation follows lengthy research trials by the Ministry of Agriculture in Sigatoka to determine the quality and suitability of East Seed varieties under Fiji's climatic and soil conditions.

"In 2018 we conducted trials of the East West seeds at our Research Station in Sigatoka and on average the germination and yield results were better when compared to current seed varieties available in the market. For example, the East West seeds recorded over 90 per cent germination rates. Bitter melon and long bean seed varieties also produced up to 13 per cent better yield," said Dr. Reddy.

"We are thankful for this timely

contribution to our seed distribution initiative as quality seeds mean better yields and returns for our farmers, and improved agriculture supply for the domestic and export market," he added.

The East West Seed Group is internationally renowned for seed research and production, and currently export to over 60 countries including across Asia.

Now for the first time these seeds are being made available in Fiji through KK's Hardware, a prominent local business based in Nadi.

"We've been serving our community for 33 years and recognise that agriculture is so important not only here in Fiji but also across the Pacific," said KK's Hardware Limited's Chief Operation Officer, Kavita Karan.

"We want to support the industry by making the best resources like improved seed varieties more easily available to farmers and are really happy to be a part of the Ministry of Agriculture's national seed distribution initiative. We would also like to acknowledge the business partnership with MDF that has allowed us to achieve this vision," Karan added.

East West seed varieties now available in Fiji include bitter melon, cabbage, cauliflower, cucumber, lettuce, coriander, watermelon, long bean, okra and eggplant.

PHOTO GALLERY



From L-R BSP Country Head Haroon Ali, Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy, PS Mr. Ritesh Dass and CEO AMA Mr. Alvin Singh after the signing of MoU between AMA and BSP.



Eastern-based Agriculture Officers with their certificates following a weeklong plant health clinic workshop pose with farmers.



Head of Institute - Mr. Uraia Waibuta, NATI Students and Officials of the Ministry of Agriculture during an In-service Training on Agriculture Production in Fiji.



Attorney General Hon. Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum opens the Agriculture Show in the Central Division.



A group photo of MoA staff and Senior Executive Management during the Fiji Day celebrations at HQ.



Minister for Fisheries Hon. Semi Koroilavesau during the Northern Agriculture Show



Animal Health and Production Division staff during the Central Agriculture Show.



Minister with Senior Officials enter through the new look foyer at Operations.