



September Issue 2021

Agriculture Sector Ready For The
Next Level: Dass
[page 2](#)

Have A Plan B: Retired Principal
Agriculture Officer
Tells Public Servants
[page 3](#)

Ministry Receives 10 Tablets From
ADRA
[page 4](#)

Covid-19 Does Little To Deter
Agriculture Achievements On
Lakeba
[page 5](#)

Long-Serving Staff Retires
[page 6](#)

Fresh/Chilled Crop And Livestock
Domestic Exports Increases From
Jan – June 2021
[page 7](#)

Photo Gallery
[page 8](#)

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MINISTER REDDY ADDRESSES THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FOOD LOSS AND WASTE



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment - Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy addressed the opening ceremony of the International Conference on Food Loss and Wastage where he stressed the importance of securing the world's food systems.

While addressing the Conference via Zoom during the opening ceremony on 11 September, Minister Reddy said food loss and waste continued to be a major issue in the Asia and Pacific region, which needed more coordinated, strategic actions to address its impact on climate change, food security and the region's overall economy.

"Food losses globally can be managed and reversed. Impact of natural resources indicated that more than 50% of waste comes from production, post-harvest handling and storage phase and the remaining occurred during processing, distribution and consumption.

Food loss and waste is the third biggest source of greenhouse gas emissions, and burden waste management systems and worsens food insecurity (UN Environment Program 2021, Food Waste Index Report). Globally, food losses and food waste represents nearly a quarter of all water used in agricultural production and cost around USD940 billion in economic losses.

Consequently, Minister Reddy emphasized the findings in the FAO Report – Food Wastage Footprint, which had identified a pattern in food waste at the global level.

"The report showed that middle and

higher-income regions experienced greater food loss at retail and consumer level while for developed countries, food loss occurred during the production phase. It identified that the greater the food waste in the later stages, the greater its environmental impact," he said.

Speaking on Fiji's local context and approach to reducing food loss and wastage, Hon. Reddy highlighted current food security programmes, like the Home Gardening initiative, which was being implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture as a means to provide a consistent supply of fresh food to its populace while also minimizing food loss and wastage, as the distance from the farm to the fork was very minimal.

He highlighted that to achieve the set targets of reducing food loss and wastage by 2030 as set under Sustainable Development Goal 12, it required a complete behavioural change on the part of the consumer, to consumer responsibly for the betterment of the environment.

"We must learn to Love Food, Hate Waste and Save money. When we learn to appreciate food, we are less likely to waste it. Though the amount of food waste is alarming, we can all work together to overcome the amount of food wasted globally.

"Only then can we reduce food loss and waste by 2030 and have a sustainable food system for future generations," said Minister Reddy.

AGRICULTURE SECTOR READY FOR THE NEXT LEVEL: DASS



Permanent Secretary for Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass.

Outgoing Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass left the Ministry officially on 1 October confident that the sector was ready to move to the next level, despite the single biggest challenge brought on by COVID-19.

Just before his departure from the Ministry, Mr Dass who has taken up his new job as the CEO of Basic Industries Limited, a subsidiary of Fijian Holdings Limited, termed his two years in the public sector as 'unmatched' with his 20 plus years in the private sector.

"I can certainly say that these two years will remain unmatched against the time I spent anywhere else, by the entire working career that I have had and possibly that I will have going forward.

"Whilst I am excited by the new challenge

that I am moving to, I am sad that I will be leaving team Agriculture. I will be cheering them from the sidelines and providing necessary support as much as I can, as we are now one family; I've learnt so much and have made many friends along the way and it's difficult to say goodbye and just move on," he said.

Mr Dass said the agriculture sector had progressed significantly, despite the challenges with consistent growth recorded in terms of production and export revenues earned, with the trend expected to continue this year.

However, he added, there was a lot of focus on building the fundamentals and getting the basics right including unlocking the potential of the Ministry's human resources.

"I believe we are at a juncture where we can accelerate our journey of growth and take

it to the next level. We have this mantra of 'Grow Beyond' and I have seen that happening not only in terms of our KPI's and deliverables but also what I consider the most important element – the growth in our people, the growth in their capability," he said.

"It's an energised culture, it's an energised environment and for me that is the most refreshing thing when you see driven, passionate and happy people going that extra mile each day, striving to do what they are supposed to do."

He said whilst COVID resulted in the delay of implementing capital programs, the silver lining was that everyone realized the importance of agriculture from the elevated level of interest by local Fijians to even offshore investors interested in investing in the sector.

"It's about us unlocking our full potential, releasing under-utilized arable land for productive purposes, putting all the resources to upscale our activities and modernizing the way we do agriculture in Fiji."

Mr. Dass continued to encourage officers in the Ministry to give their best and challenged them to strive to leave behind a legacy that their children, grandchildren, and their families could be proud of.

"Any organization is as good as its people, and I think we've got genuine people, a genuine team, really wanting to do their best. So, the message to the people, when you wake up in the morning think about what is it that you want to be known for – get to work, give your 100 per cent and create that moment that you can be proud of. If everybody comes with that mindset, we will be able to achieve magic."

8,600 REGISTER INTEREST FOR NEW AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS



Hydroponic farming practice

Close to 8,600 online applications have been received by the Ministry of Agriculture for the new programs recently announced by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and

Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy.

Agriculture Acting Permanent Secretary, Dr Vinesh Kumar said nine of the ten programs were open for three weeks from August 20 to September 10.

"When applications closed, we had received a total of 8,483 online forms together with the required documents which included a copy of the farmer's ID card, vaccination card, and evidence of land tenure status. The nine programs were Fencing Kits, Hydroponic System, Intensive Dairy Farming, Irrigation Kit, Land Clearing, Orchard Development, Protected Agriculture, Small Farming Equipment, and Women in Agriculture," he explained.

"The program that received the most interest was the Small Farming Equipment where 3,106 applications were received. Fencing kits was next in line with 1,466 applications, followed by Land Clearing with 1,208 applications. In essence, we were inundated with applications for all these programs, which showed that more Fijians are interested in agriculture," he

said.

He said the final program – Commercial Farmers Equity Package (CFEP) received a total of 59 applications after it closed in mid-September. He

said the CFEP programme targeted commercial farmers and agro-processors who needed equity assistance when applying for the Fiji Development Bank commercial agriculture loan.

Dr. Kumar explained the team was in the process of verifying the details of all applicants.

The decision will be made known to successful applicants following field verification.

HAVE A PLAN B: RETIRED PRINCIPAL AGRICULTURE OFFICER TELLS PUBLIC SERVANTS



Retired Principal Agriculture Officer – Eastern Mr Epeli Dugucagi.

Most civil servants who stay in government quarters do not plan well and are unprepared when it's time for them to retire and leave. It is the reason that it is even more important that current civil servants have an exit plan when they leave the government quarters.

Such were the pearls of wisdom, shared by recently retired Ministry of Agriculture Principal Agriculture Officer – Eastern, Mr Epeli Dugucagi, 55, at his farewell.

As he leaves the Ministry to enjoy his retirement, he says he has nothing to worry about because he has a home in Suva and one in his village in Wainibuka; his farm will keep him busy, given the 3,000 yaqona plants and 1,000 dalo suckers already in the ground and an additional 1,000 yaqona plants in Kadavu; a car and a carrier as well to assist.

“Civil servants, when they retire, they should be enjoying their retirement money for all those years they have worked hard; not using it to build their home. So as I retire, I have nothing to worry about it, I prepared well and will enjoy my retirement,” he said.

Mr Dugucagi was one of the longest-serving civil servants in the Ministry, whose career spanned an impressive 32 years; two years at the Ministry of Education with the remaining years at the Ministry of Agriculture.

As expected, he climbed the ranks and began his career in an agency that has since been re-branded and is now spotting a modern moniker such as the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), which was the then Agriculture Quarantine Services, before it was renamed the Fiji Quarantine and Inspection Services, then to the new BAF.

He was one of those that pioneered the development of the High-Temperature Forced Air (HTFA) plant in Nadi, which treats all fruits with hot and dry fan-driven air for a certain duration to eradicate unwanted pests before it is exported.

He also was involved in the development of the HTFA Manual which he travelled to the Cook Islands to study the concept for three months, as it was the only Pacific Island country at that time that had established an HTFA Plant, besides Hawaii. He successfully transferred the knowledge on his return home, which led to the establishment of Fiji's own HTFA in Nadi.

From Quarantine, Mr Dugucagi then joined the Landuse Resettlement Division of the Ministry, which was tasked to look for available land for farmers whose land leases had expired.

He also worked in Farm Management

before heading to Kadavu to take up the Senior Agriculture Officer's post to look after farmers there. He was also Principal Agriculture Officer – HQ before successfully taking up the last post that he held till his retirement - PAO Eastern.

“I really enjoyed working in the Ministry, I learnt a lot. I have travelled to a lot of places within the Pacific, Asia, Brazil, South Africa, India; I have gained a lot. But it hurts too that there are some things I was not able to complete. There is a lot to do in Fiji's agriculture sector, especially in turning unproductive land into productive land. That is an area we need to develop,” he explained.

Soil health, Mr Dugucagi added, was another area that needed greater focus. “Improving soil conditions will improve agriculture.”

The former PAO Eastern said the division had its own unique challenges that were different from the others.

“Logistically and connectivity-wise, Eastern Division was challenging. In other divisions, you are able to reach one station within the day or within an hour. That is not the case with Eastern.

“Travelling itself will take a day at least from Suva to reach one station and returning would take two to three days,” he explained.

However, he was confident that with the right guidance by whoever would succeed him; the potential the division offered, would be realised.

“Most of the islands in the Eastern Division are organic certified and there is still a lot more to do in this area. I believe whoever will come after me, needs to have good organizational and planning skills to achieve the outputs,” he said.

Outgoing Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass thanked Mr Dugucagi for all the work he had done, including his associations and companionship with colleagues and to the service he provided to the community and farmers.

“You had one of the most challenging divisions to work with and given the uniqueness of the challenges, I am sure it was not an easy feat. But you have done an amazing job, one that will be hard to match, my friend. On behalf of the Hon. Minister and the Ministry of Agriculture thank you for all your hard work, all your dedication, all your support, a Big Vinaka Vakalevu! We wish you all the very best for your future endeavours,” the PS said.

MINISTRY RECEIVES 10 TABLETS FROM ADRA



PS Agriculture Ritesh Dass receives the Tablet from the Country Director for ADRA Mr Iliapi Tuwai.

The Ministry of Agriculture received 10 tablets from the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) to improve connectivity and help streamline information system processes within the Ministry's internal procedures.

Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Ritesh Dass while receiving the donation said it would go a long way as current data collection systems in the Ministry required

such tools to ensure efficiency and effective dissemination of collated information.

Mr Dass said this assistance will provide the necessary support to the Food Security Cluster secretariat and any future Disaster Damage Assessment operations in the event of natural disasters.

He thanked ADRA for the continuous support to the Ministry and assured that the

equipment would be fully utilised to enhance service delivery.

"Thank you so much for your unceasing support to the Ministry in all our activities to develop Fiji's agriculture sector," said Mr Dass.

Mr Dass also acknowledged ADRA for the assistance in the recent Cash for Cultivation programme which allowed the Ministry to reach out to 3,000 farmers who were impacted by the pandemic.

"The current COVID-19 pandemic exposed the importance of agriculture to providing food and nutrition security and enhancing our livelihoods. Therefore, we can only respond properly as a sector to this demand through collaboration and strong partnership. I believe engaging with your team during these trying times was critical for the Ministry, vinaka vakalevu."

Meanwhile, Fiji Country Director for ADRA Mr. Iliapi Tuwai said ADRA would continue to provide support to Government to gather crucial information to fight the COVID-19 crisis.

He said the tablets will be used by the Food Security Cluster team of the Ministry to collect data to address food security in the country.

The assistance is funded by the USAID and jointly implemented by CARE Australia.

PIGS SHIPPED TO MOALA TO IMPROVE ISLAND DIET



Pigs ready for shipment to Moala.

An outer island community in the Eastern Division was assisted with eight pigs to help improve their protein-deficient diet.

The discussion was held between the Minister of Health and Medical Services, Hon. Dr Ifereimi Waqainabete and Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy where the issue of a lack of protein-source

for villages on Moala Island, in the Lau Group was raised as a concern.

Agriculture Acting Permanent Secretary, Dr Vinesh Kumar said once the issue was raised they quickly worked out a solution and on Tuesday (21.9.21) evening, eight pigs were shipped to Moala.

"There were six female and two male

weaners which are a crossbreed of local and improved strain from Koronivia Research Station. Some characteristics of these pigs are; they are adaptive to climate change which means they can adjust to extreme weather conditions; their growth rate is better in terms of weight gain; at full adulthood, these pigs can eat anything as opposed to exotic breed, which can only eat manufactured feed and nothing else," Dr Kumar explained.

Accompanying the animals, were 20 bags of 25kg of feed (Grower). Dr Kumar explained, while the pigs were bred to eat anything, the ones transported to Moala were newly weaned from their mothers, hence its food would need to be supplemented with the feed until it fully transitioned to the local food.

He said the delivery of the pigs to Moala also meant it would help the community replenish its protein source.

"The female pigs will be able to produce an average of 96 piglets in a year. So it should help the community," he said.

He said it appeared the reason the number of pigs in Moala continued to

reduce was due to poor breeding practices and fulfilling communal obligations.

“The pigs were equally shared between Naroi and Keteira Villages. Four pigs; three females and one male were given to these villages. The villages were chosen due to their location which is at

either ends of the island,” the Acting PS said.

He added that the Extension offices on Moala would also provide technical advice on how to properly breed the swine to ensure sustainability.

Moala has eight villages with a

population of 1,231; 358 households, and 268 farmers. The farmers there are more crop intensive focused, planting mainly dalo and yaqona. The main market for their yaqona is to a Canadian-based company while their crops are bought by middlemen in Suva.

COVID-19 DOES LITTLE TO DETER AGRICULTURE ACHIEVEMENTS ON LAKEBA

Recognizing the agriculture endeavours of your very own goes a long way in motivating one's own community.

This was the case for a Mataqali (land-owning unit) on Lakeba Island, in Lau who held an awards ceremony to recognize the agricultural prowess and achievements of outstanding members of their mataqali, all this despite and amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which is yet another successful agriculture-promotion story in and of itself.

At Yadrana Village, villagers held the ‘Babunia Mini-Agriculture Show’ on August 22. Babunia is the name of the Mataqali whose members make up the majority of Yadrana Village. The Mini AgShow was the first of its kind to be held there.

Event Committee Chairman and Lakeba District Rep to the Lau Provincial Council, Mr Uate Soko explained in i-Taukei that the reason they decided to hold the event was to show what they could still achieve despite these

challenging times.

He said the women from the Mataqali, as well as the women generally from Lakeba, were the major suppliers of mats and tapa that were ordered on the Facebook platform called ‘Veivoli Va Kawa I-Taukei’, a social media platform established to conduct trade on valuable i-Taukei artifacts and items.

Therefore, on ‘Babunia Day’ the women showed off their skills of beautifully hand-woven mats and were deservedly recognized for their efforts including the men for their crop planting.

The awards that were up for grabs included ‘Yaqona Farmer of the Year’ won by Jone Salabogi, 50, who has a total of 4,500 plants in various stages of growth up to three years. ‘Yaqona Progressive Farmer of the Year’ went to Jone Maukakala, 59, who has 4,000 plants with the same growth rate. ‘Second Runner Up’ in the ‘Yaqona Progressive Farmer of the Year’ category, went to Kelera Ledua, 40, with 3,400 plants.

The ‘Young Farmer of the Year’ was awarded to 15-year-old Uate Soko Jnr, who has a total of 1,300 yaqona plants. Meanwhile ‘Voivoi Producer of the Year’ went to Ana Fane, 67, who has 8,000 plants.

The Ministry of Agriculture provided the trophies and certificates for the Awards ceremony. Earlier in 2017, under the Rural and Outer Island program, the Ministry built a processing shed that cost \$18,000 for mat-weaving and tapa-making for the women.

The men, on the other hand, after the devastation caused by TC Winston re-started Yaqona planting in 2017 after three decades of not planting Yaqona at all. The Ministry provided advice and encouraged the men to re-start planting, and from that time till today, yaqona farms are a normal sight all over the island.

Today, Lakeba boasts four yaqona clusters including youths. The island has eight villages with a population of 1,499;



Kelera Ledua - 2nd runner up Yaqona Progressive Farmer of the Year.



Jone Salabogi - Yaqona Farmer of the Year.



Ana Fane - Voivoi Producer of the Year.



Jone Maukakala - Yaqona Progressive Farmer.



Uate Soko Jnr - Young Farmer of the Year.

LONG-SERVING STAFF RETIRES

“Perseverance is the key to achieving true potential and being persistent, having the courage to face your fears, you will be able to achieve anything you set your mind on.”

These were the parting sentiments of retired Naduruloulou Research Station fieldman Orisi Wede originally from Saolo, Wainunu in Bua.

Inspired by the work of his father Laisenia Wede who was stationed at the same Research Station, Orisi together with his brother Joni Wede followed suit in 1991.

Before he started his career with the Ministry, he combed the doors of work opportunities, working for companies such as Martin Fabric, Pioneer Concrete, a gas company and the Waituri Feed Mill.

“When I joined as a casual staff in 1991, I was partially equipped with the work done at the station as I grew up seeing and assisting my father at the station on the days he needed assistance,” he said.

Orisi as he mentioned was born and bred amongst the researched citrus fruits, spending his days running through the mahogany surrounded compound of Naduruloulou.

“I remember seeing my father working at the station and sometimes he would take me

along to teach me the ropes of his work which I later realized the benefits of when I started working here and that which would also help me later on, now that I retire to continue the skill I have long possessed.”

Throughout his 30 years of service, he sailed through being a casual worker to being a temporary watchman right till his retirement as a field worker.

As a fieldworker, his work amongst other

adjust to it and keep working,” he said.

“Education-wise, my level was not really to the highest but it was perseverance and obedience that brought me through these 30 years.”

“Never be let down by your post in your workplace, always remember that regardless of your post, you are making a difference and also contributing to the core function of the Ministry.

Acting OIC/
Technical Officer
II (Agronomy)
Naduruloulou Station
Filimoni Raiyawa
thanked Mr Wede
for his service, time
and dedication to the
Ministry and especially
toward the Research
Division.

“Some highlights of his career involves the establishment of the Waimaro and Dobuilevu Cacao trial and achieving the annual targets of the station.

“He never limits himself to his role and is often keen to be part of any delegated activities

assigned by the supervisor.”

His talent of serenading and entertainment coupled with irritating humorous words that never fails to crack everyone up will be missed by the staff of Naduruloulou Research Station.



Orisi Wede (middle) with colleagues from Naduruloulou during his farewell.

things includes assisting in the grafting and marcotting of citrus plants and the budding of cocoa seedlings.

“Throughout my years I came across different bosses and along with them come winds of change, all there was to do was to

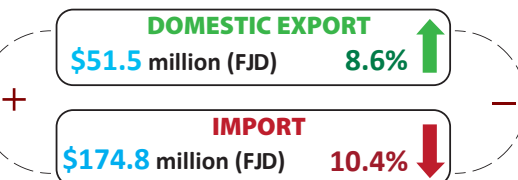
FRESH/CHILLED CROP AND LIVESTOCK DOMESTIC EXPORTS INCREASES FROM JAN – JUNE 2021

TOTAL TRADE



\$226.3
million (FJD)

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*Half year 2021 data as compared to the same period last year (2020)

TOTAL BALANCE



-\$123.3
million (FJD)

The value of domestic exports for fresh/chilled crops and livestock for the first half of this year was \$51.5m, an increase of 8.6per cent from the same period in 2020.

Permanent Secretary for Agriculture, Mr Ritesh Dass said this was one of the major highlights of the key trade statistics and performance of the agriculture sector with particular emphasis on crop and livestock

commodities for the first six months of 2021 compiled by the Ministry's Fiji Agriculture and Rural Statistics Unit.

“It is interesting to note as well that the value of domestic exports recorded an average growth of 14per cent for the first half of the year for the years 2019, 2020 and this year.

“This is indeed quite significant and shows that our fresh/chilled crop and livestock

commodities and products are popular and in demand,” Mr. Dass explained.

He said another key point to highlight was the reduction of imports for fresh/chilled crop and live-stock by 10.4per cent or \$174.8m compared to the same period last year. Last year, he added, the value of imports for fresh/chilled crops and livestock from January to June was \$195m.

“Other significant highlights of the key trade statistics and performance of the agriculture sector

was the major export produce where ginger exports increased by 100per cent and raked in \$2.2m.

Turmeric is another commodity that did very well with exports increasing by 64.2per cent or amounting to \$8.7m. Taro is the other crop that also recorded positive results with an increase of 12.2per cent or \$13.8m,” Mr Dass

said.

In terms of Fiji’s trading partners, he said, the United States, and neighbours New Zealand and Aus-tralia continued to be the leading countries we exported our fresh/ chilled crop and livestock to.

“The US is our top country to export our kava and turmeric to for the first half of this year. New Zealand is our second-largest country where other vegetables, fresh or chilled have been their ma-jor demand,

followed by kava, taro, turmeric, ginger, and a mixture of spices. Australia is the third-largest trading partner where they have had the biggest demand for our taro and ginger,” he added.

Though kava exports raked in \$19.4million in revenue during this period, this reflected a slight de-crease of 5.8% from January – June 2021, as compared to the same period last year.

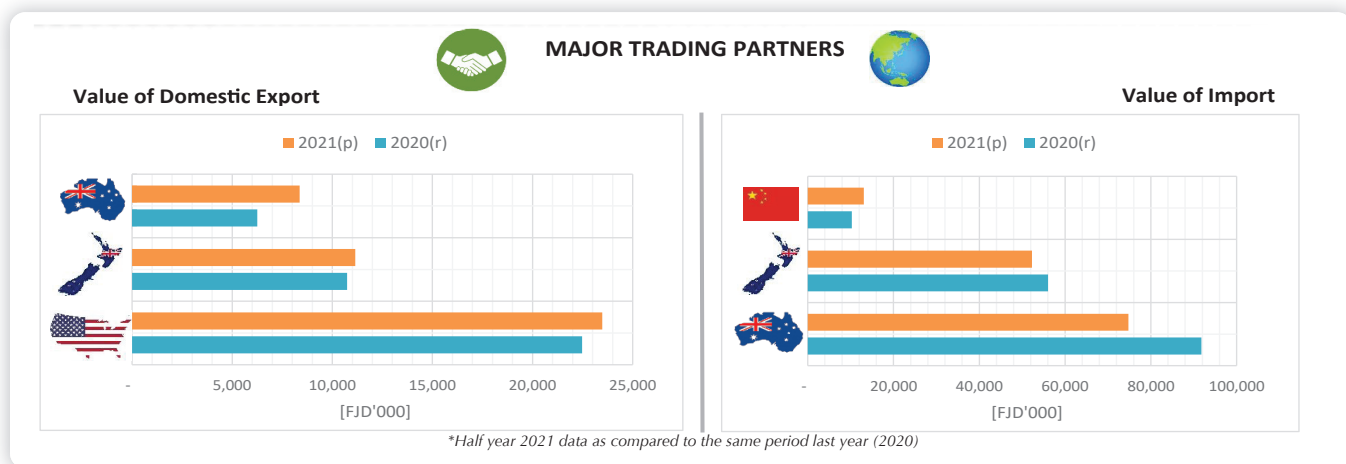
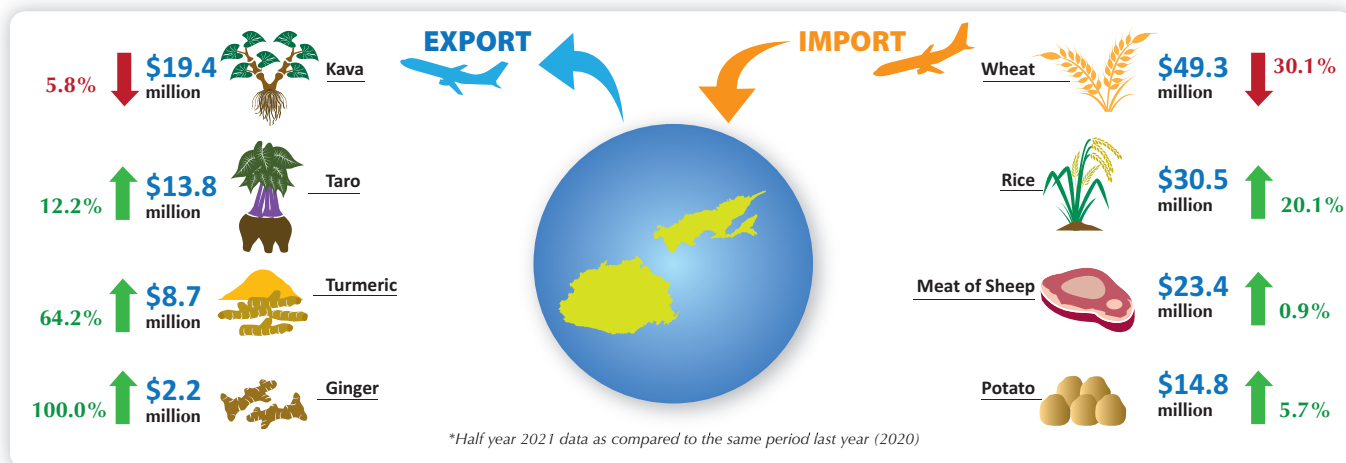


PHOTO GALLERY



Ministry farewell PAO Eastern - Mr. Epeli Dugucagi at HQ, Raiwaqa.



Ministry farewells former PS Agriculture - Mr. Ritesh Dass.



Glanvac Vaccination drive at Batiri and Seaqaqa.



Assessment of weeds in rice Plantation at KRS.



MoA Staff Tevita Natasawai during the Live and Learn Food Distribution in the Rewa Delta.



SAO Lau - Mr. Nimilote Waqabaca during the handing over of farm implements donated by Suva Rotary Club.



Live and Learn Food distribution Team.



HR Male Officers hosted to a special treat on Father's Day by the Division.