



SWEET SINGHS



Mr. Baldeo Singh (left) with son Mani Singh at their farm

Ripley Queen is known as the world's sweetest pineapple at 19.8 per cent proven pleasantness and this tropical fruit is the reason the Singh family has become successful farmers of it, from humble beginnings starting off with just

two acres of land almost a century ago.

Surrounded by the prickly pineapple field overlooking the ocean, breathes motivation to the father and son team living at Vulagi Settlement in Tailevu.

Father is 80-year-old Baldeo Singh and his 57-year-old son Mani Singh who are both widowers and work in unison cultivating their now 20-acres land.

"This is a freehold land and we have been doing pineapple farming since 1960 and we grew up breathing the sweet scented smell year in, year out," said Baldeo.

"When our family started planting pineapple, at harvest time we would also sell to the local school that we attended," he said.

"We would walk with our pineapple bundles to sell in school and to the neighbors and sometimes the sale becomes short because we get hungry and mischievous."

Baldeo smiled fondly recalling his younger days, moments he cherished of growing up completely relying on pineapple farming as their primary source of income.

"We tried planting other commodities on the land but pineapple did well and so we remained with that."

"Because securing a spot in the prominent secondary schools around us was hard, we dropped out at primary school level to work on the farm," he said.

"Although we did that, the relationship with our i-Taukei community was not affected; we accepted our fate knowing the farm will provide for our future."

And so it went that Baldeo eventually took over the reins from his father, got married and brought his family up on the farm continuing the tradition of his father.

"The maintenance of the pineapple farm was shared amongst my family, till the passing of my wife and daughter-in-law leaving my son and I to continue," he said.

It is obvious there is no feminine influence in their home given

the strong masculinity that permeates their humble abode as opposed to what was once an environment filled with laughter and the delicious smell of food from the kitchen, usually signaling that women were bustling in and around that area. Sadly, today the only aromas that fill the air are those of the ripe, fruity, sweet, and bright smell of pineapple.

"Although we are living alone now as father and son without the lively environment we used to encounter, we try to make our customers feel comfortable by providing pineapples to them," said Baldeo.

"From the 20 acres, we harvest weekly for both the on and off seasons and we are not disheartened by the competition during on season," he said with a smile.

Baldeo looks after the maintenance of the farm while Mani looks after the marketing aspect of the pineapple.

"During the off-seasons from February to October, we sell our pineapples at \$8 to \$10 a dozen and \$4 to \$5 during the season in October to February," he said.

"In a day, we would be producing 50 to 80 dozens and this is apart from harvesting, where we are also trimming and controlling pests," said Baldeo.

The vast area is divided into sections with the on-season area as old as 20-years; five-years for the off-season; and a year for trial cross-breeds.

"Over the years we have come across various introductions to new varieties and our farm is open for experiments. So apart from the Ripley Queen variety that dominates the farm, we also have the Smooth Cayenne and Veimama varieties," said Baldeo.

Farm work is 100 per cent manual work; from pruning and spraying to carting the produce by bullocks of around 50 bags from the farm to the collection center.

"There are 40 water drums placed in all the sections of the field for spraying. We also have an engine spray brush-cutter that prunes with a laborer to assist around the farm," he said.

"We credited the cycle that we are in now, to the ideas of our elders as they encouraged us to practice this for the purpose of producing both for off and on seasons," he said with appreciation.

Paying patronage to their Punjabi roots, the father and son team named their pineapple transporter "Khanpurs".

"From the money made from the pineapple sales, we renovated our family home and in 2018 we decided to buy a land cruiser worth \$75,000 for the sole reason of transporting pineapples to the market. Previously, we were hiring vehicles and it took out a large portion of our sale. This was all made possible from the cultivation of pineapple," he said.

Their hard work was recognized when Baldeo scooped the 'Best Pineapple Farmer' award in the 2015 National Agriculture Show.

"We would like to thank the Ministry of Agriculture for not only the recognition, but also assisting us with Agro inputs, the upgrading of farm roads, and fertilizer subsidy," said Baldeo.

The Singh family were assisted under the 2016-2017 Food Security Programme and the Farm Care initiative of the Ministry when their farm was used as a pilot project for vetiver planting.

GROWING PINEAPPLE FOR CASH



A pineapple fruit in Ba.

Recommended varieties:

- Smooth Cayenne
- Ripley Queen

Fruiting Season:

Main Season
November to April
Off Season:
February to October.

Seed Rate

Sloppy Land: (37,037 suckers/ha)

Flatland - 48,000 suckers/ha

Planting Time:

Best time to plant is in the dry season
(April to July) to prevent base rot.

On flat lands, used raised beds.
Practice phase planting for all year round production.

Spacing

Sloppy land
1.2m between ridges, 0.6m between rows per ridge and 0.3m

between plants (Double rows)

Flat land

1m between ridges, 0.4m between rows per ridge and 0.3m between plants (Double rows)

Planting materials

Crown (tops), slips & aerial suckers. Best planting material are suckers weighing 250 to 300g or 25 to 30cm high.

Quartered plantlets from nursery.

Contour planting practiced on slope land to avoid soil erosion under alley cropping with integrated approach.

Fertilizer/Manure

Soil analysis should be done before planting

Super phosphate: Apply 250kg/ha at planting.

Urea: Apply 110kg/ha at 1 month after planting.

NPK: 13:13:21 apply at 250kg/ha at 4 months interval after planting. Main season and Mini season

apply Etherel (Ethyphon) at 75ml & in Off season at 100ml with 1kg Urea 250g Borax in 50 litres of water. Apply dose in the centre of plant at 50ml/plant. Application to be done after 3pm. Harvest 5 months after hormone application. Repeat application if it rains after 3 hours.

Weed Control/Management

Manual weeding or inter-row cultivation from 1 to 3 months after planting.

Then use herbicides to control weeds. Karmax (Diuron 80/Diuron 90) at 100g/15L of water to be applied to plot before or after flowering & fruit set.

Disease Control/Management

Heart & Root rot:
Planting during the dry season with good field drainage. Spray fungicide Sundomil at 50g/15L of water)

Base rot: Dip the planting material in fungicide before planting. Dithane M-45 at

22g/15L of water or Apply Benomyl at 15g/15L of water (Sold as Benlate)

Harvest/Yield/Food Value

Sloppy land
Plant crop: 40 to 60 tonnes/ha.
1st ratoon:
30 to 40 tonnes/ha

2nd ratoon:
20 to 25 tonnes/ha.

Flatland
60 to 70 tonnes/ha.

Food Value: Good source of Vitamin C and Vitamin B1 and also contains fibre.

Disaster Risk and Climate Change tips

Floods, heavy rains:
Plant on raised beds.

Good for soil erosion control, tolerant to a range of soil types. If not affected, can be a good source of income after disaster.