

Fiji's Dairy Industry - The Milked Price



A dairy calf in Ba

Over the last 10 years, Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis have had an impact on the dairy industry, causing a decline in local milk production.

Between 2010 and 2020, more than 4,000 dairy cattle have succumbed to the diseases, which has taken a major toll on the dairy industry.

Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the Government had prioritized its resources, both technical and financial, to eradicate the diseases.

"These diseases have had a major impact on dairy production in Fiji and they have presented the single biggest challenge for dairy farmers and the industry," he said.

"Over the last five years, the Ministry has progressively doubled its investment to a dedicated program and a total of F\$9.6m has already been allocated to combat these diseases in the last 5 years and we are making good progress."

Also, a dairy database called Bovibase has been established, with support from the New Zealand Government; the database will be used by all industry stakeholders to track disease testing, production and farm data.

With the disease eradication program of the Ministry of Agriculture, the industry is beginning to make solid gains.

The total volume of smallholder milk production (from the Central and Western Divisions) increased from 4.14million litres in 2018 to 4.18million litres in 2019 respectively.

The number of milking cows in 2019 increased to 5,370, an increase of 20.6% from the previous year.

"This reflects strong growth in stock numbers on smallholder farms, as bulk supplier farms, who suffered the brunt of the disease, slowly recovered," Minister Reddy highlighted.

Milk yields per cow per day - a key measure of farm productivity, has indicated a 1-2 percent improvement on various focus farms in the past 2 years.

At the Ministry of Agriculture's Koronivia Farm, which doubles as a demonstration farm, milk yields averaged 5 litres per cow per day in 2017, with gradual progress to 9.7 litres per cow per day in 2019, in comparison to peak yields reached of over 15 litres per cow per day in late 2018.

To demonstrate a holistic approach to creating a sustainable dairy industry, an accredited training pathway for dairy products has been designed with the assistance of the Fiji Higher Education Commission (FHEC).

"Soon, and for the first time in Fiji, a standardized pathway to upgrade skills in this important industry will be available to youths, extension workers and all stakeholders," said Hon Reddy.

"In many ways, diseases brought about systemic challenges - challenges that faced the cattle industry for many years and Government has taken the commercial, disease and industry challenges faced by the dairy business in Fiji head-on, much more remains to be done but we are on a positive trend."

Milk processing in Fiji is operated by the Fiji Dairy Limited (FDL), 20 percent of FDL is owned by farmers through the Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited (FCDCL).

Use Local Produce, Renowned Chef Urges



Chef Chung demonstrates Contemporary Island Cuisine cooking techniques during the training in Savusavu

Participants of the Contemporary Island Cuisine cooks training had the opportunity to learn from Pacific-renowned Chef, Colin Chung, and Greg Cornwall, hospitality consultants, and partners at PIRC, the skill of blending delicacies using locally grown produce.

Chef Chung said the training was also a way to promote Agri-tourism and to highlight the need to reduce imports for the benefit of the local economy.

"The contemporary island cuisine training is designed to use the best local produce available to innovatively create prime island-style dishes to become the new contemporary taste of the islands, creating local island versions with our own fresh produce which is in season," he said.

"This will practically increase and promote the use and demand for local produce in hotels and resorts, increase farmers, producers, fishermen, and local businesses incomes," said Mr. Chung.

"For many island nations, tourism provides good economic growth and employment opportunities, however, importing the majority of produce to feed tourists detracts from this benefit to the local economy," he said.

The skills training included different local traditional dishes recreated in a contemporary way, pinched in presentation, added flavours, and modern cooking methods borrowed from Pan-Asian or Western cuisines.

"With the growth of food tourism, sustainability, organics, reducing carbon

use and farm-plate eating preferences, we are in a prime position to showcase our local produce to this cuisine understanding, mobile market."

"The second way to create a contemporary Fijian dish is to take high quality and in-season local ingredients and create contemporary dishes using Pan-Asian flavours, seasonings, and cooking styles," he said.

"Island fries using local root vegetables are a good example of this, as are vasua and kai fritters or mahimahi fishcake," Mr. Chung added.

"Let us appreciate the many varieties of local fruits and vegetables, crops, seafood and meat we have and continue to develop the tourism and agriculture sectors," he reiterated.

Mr. Chung stressed the need to work together to develop a culinary niche, ensuring farmers continued to benefit from a change in menu choices on the local tourism market to make Fiji a destination renowned for its quality, organic, fresh and local cuisine.

Participating chefs were from the Copra Sheds Apartments, Copra Sheds Marina, Daku Resort, Namale Fiji Islands Resort and Spa, Salt Lake Lodge, Savusavu Hot Springs Hotel, Tavola Coast, Laucala Island Resort, Jean Michael Cousteau, Nukubati Island Resort, Senidilo Womens Homestay, Yaro Women's Club, Savudrodoro Women's Club, Nukubalavu Women's Club, Sugarlicious Savusavu, and the Savusavu Tourism Association.

Kavanagasau and Mid-Valley Farmers Receive Hand-Held Tractors



Hon. Minister Dr. Mahendra Reddy (3rd from the left) with farmers and Senior Agriculture Officials at Kavanagasau

Rice farmers of Kavanagasau and Mid Valley in Nadroga received hand-held tractors from the Ministry of Agriculture to assist them with their land preparation.

While handing over the hand-held tractors to the two farming clusters, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the assistance was to be used by them to progress towards commercializing their respective agricultural ventures.

"Through such assistance, we want you all to treat agriculture as a business, as the Ministry will be supporting you with land preparation, provision of markets and technical advice," he added

Hon. Reddy also reassured farmers of the Government's efforts to address food and nutrition security in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He reiterated that the Agriculture COVID-19 Response, which was recently announced was a precautionary measure taken by the Ministry to mitigate the impact of the disease and to help sustain local agricultural production.

"We are organizing the Farm Support Packages as a response to the COVID-19 issue that has arisen and we do not want to be caught in a scenario whereby we will have a shortage of food; we want to swiftly boost production.

He advised farmers to visit their nearest agriculture extension office from 30th March to access one crop seed or planting material to be planted on 0.25 hectares at zero cost.

The targeted crops are Taro, Cassava, Rice, Kumala, Duruka, Eggplant, Chillies, Okra, Tomatoes, Maize, Bitter gourd, Pidgeon-pea and cowpeas.

"To access this assistance, farmers will need to fill the Agriculture COVID-19 Response form available at the Ministry of Agriculture offices, as our officials will monitor all who have received assistance to ensure that seeds are not wasted," said Hon. Reddy.