

To Sow and Reap - Lavenia's Story



Mrs. Lavenia Tagi at her backyard farm.

A man reaps what he sows.

This is the defining verse that has driven Lavenia Tagi to become the woman she is today.

The seeds for her passion for agriculture were sown when she was but a young lass, growing up in the province of Bua in Vanua Levu. Her father, Apenisa Malai Tagi helped to nurture this urge within her when he served as the Postmaster at the Namalata, Kubulau station in Bua.

As a young girl, she'd help her father tend their home garden, and her relationship with agriculture only grew in leaps and bounds.

"My father loved to plant and every seed he planted would grow, we were even under the impression that the land we lived on was not fertile and farming on it would be useless," she said.

The Tagi family however would not let this deter them from growing their food as they set off on preparing their back yard to plant vegetables. Much to the surprise of the locals, their vegetables would flourish.

"Villagers told my dad that nothing could be grown on that land, but we tried our hand at planting and we eventually harvested our vegetables, even supplying our vegetables to the villagers," she said.

"He used to motivate me to say that nothing was impossible with God, we only need to take the first step, the rest would be His, and this was proven by our plentiful harvest from our garden."

"For me practically, home gardening has always been a hobby and we even talked to the plants to motivate them to grow, we also prayed over our garden during our daily devotions," she smiled.

She reminisced her time as a youngster growing up in Kubulau, especially her time in school as they would walk through forest cover and past a cattle farm to reach their home; "I always had a sack with me, added to my school bag, and it was my responsibility after school to collect any dry cow dung along the way for our garden."

La, as she is affectionately called, would always look forward to the time spent on their home garden with her mother and two brothers.

"At our backyard in Bua, we planted carrots, spring onions, cabbage, long bean, so we didn't have to take a 4-hour ride to the Savusavu market to get vegetables for our meals as we had it all grown in the garden."

From her home garden straight to the lecture room of the then Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA), La decided to broaden her knowledge in agriculture, enrolling at the college in 2006-2008, before furthering her studies at the University of the South Pacific's Alafua Campus in Samoa in 2011-2013 before joining the Ministry in 2015.

Her upbringing helped mould her into the capable professional agriculturalist that she is now, as she works for the Ministry of Agriculture as the Agriculture Assistant (Yasawa).

"My work involves assisting the Agriculture Technical Officer in making sure that all identified projects of the Ministry of Agriculture for Lautoka and Yasawa are implemented properly according to our budget," she said.

"So far there are 9 clusters that have been formed and clustering of farmers is making our work easier."

"I was interested in medicine right up until Form 7 when I came to understand agriculture and the career paths it offered, through FCA I was introduced to other commercial farmers who started small and this motivated me more," she said.

"It is a diverse and secure field compared to other fields whereby for example, if you were to struggle financially, the land is always there and you can apply the principles of agriculture that you learnt to help feed your family."

Work takes up most of her time but that does not prevent her from the passion she's held for farming, as she returns home to tend to her garden in the afternoon and weekends.

"Mindsets have changed for my husband and I, besides meeting our children, we always look forward to waking up early to a new day and getting back home in the afternoon just to check on and work in our garden," she said.

"More than 50% of our salary is for our food, with our garden, at least we can save \$20 per week on vegetables and this can all go into our children's money box," she said.

"With your home garden and through best practice, there will always be food on the table, even without money, you can feed your family with fresh fruits and vegetables," she added.

"Always engage your family members in the garden as it is not only a healthy practice in terms of food and exercise but it might also change someone's mindset," she challenged.

"Keep planting your food and use your backyard well as you will not know how much food your backyard can provide for you and your family, you will also save

money doing so.

With the harvest from their backyard, La is now certain that she is providing her family with a daily balanced diet; "With the pawpaw and banana from our garden, and a cup of blended milk, I make smoothies for my children and it will be drunk within 5 minutes, and I also substitute sweet potatoes for potato when making curry and stews."

She has practiced what she preaches at home and is more composed in her role; "As a technical officer, I now feel another level of confidence in advising farmers how to manage their farms and the best practices they can apply for improved results on their farms," she said.

"If you're thinking of securing a bigger farm, start with your backyard first. Practice, intercropping, mixed cropping, using aromatic plants, compost tea, as well as mixing your insecticides from Neem, chillie, garlic, etc. to minimize costs and maximize production for a larger area and also practice organic farming on your backyard."

"Spend time on your plots, clean it well, break the soil and remember to water the soil well before transplanting," she concluded.

Lavenia and her family have witnessed the positive elements of engaging in home gardening, having planted maize, Bongo chillies, Chinese cabbage, Lettuce, Bananas, Plantain, Kumala, Cassava, Pineapple, Lemongrass, Long bean, Yams, Eggplant (Pritam and Chahat varieties), Pawpaw and Moca (amaranthus).

Growing Cabbage for Cash

Chinese Cabbage
(*Brassica chinensis*)



Recommended Varieties:

- Pak Choy
- Kwang Moon
- Wong Bok
- Joi Choy

Seed Rate
300 grams/ha

Planting Time
Best if planted during the cool season but can be grown throughout the year.

Planting Methods:
Seeds are sown in well prepared seedbeds or seedling trays and transplanted in the field after 3-4 weeks or at 3 leaf stage.

CHINESE CABBAGE

Spacing	Fertilizer/Manure	Weed Control/Management	Disease Control Management	Insect Control/Management	Harvest/Yield/Food Value	Disaster Risk and Climate Change tips
Between rows: 0.5- 0.75m Plants within rows: 0.3m Germination: 4 to 6 days after sowing. Transplanting: Transplanting can be done during cloudy days or late in the afternoon. Seedlings raised in seed trays can be planted any time of the day. Water the plants after transplanting and continue afterwards.	Soil analysis should be done before planting. a) Poultry Manure: 5 tons/ha Broadcast and mix well with soil 2 weeks before planting. b) NPK: - 13:13:21 200kg/ha broadcast and work into the soil before transplanting. c) Urea: 100kg/ha. Side dressed in 2 split applications i.e 2 -4 weeks after transplanting. Soil analysis should be done during site selection.	Practice manual weed control. Hand weed with hoe Fusilade at 45ml/15L of water. Spray at 4 to 5 leaf stage of weeds.	Soft Rot: Avoid planting during wet weather; remove any sick plant as soon as you see one; avoid damaging the crop during weeding and use disease-free seeds and seedlings. Remove (bury or burn) all diseased plants after harvest. Maintain good drainage	Lepidopteran pest, Diamond Back moth, Large cabbage moth, Centre grub, Greasy cutworm: Apply Superguard at 7.5ml/15L knapsack Steward at 5ml/10L of water only when recent damage is visible. Or Prevathorn at 10-15ml/10L of water Or Bt 8g/16L knapsack Or Multiguard 8-10ml/16L knapsack Aphids: Dimethioate at 15ml/15L (Sold as Rogor) or Bifenthrin at 15 to 20ml/15L of water.	Usually takes 30 - 60 days to get ready depending on variety. Yield: 10- 12 tonnes/ha Food Value: Source of Vitamin A, Vitamin B & Vitamin C.	Can be a good source of food and income after disaster as Chinese cabbage is very quick to mature and has good market value.