



Watisoni Sovivikula - Truant, Father, Farmer & Mentor



Mr. Sovivikula at his sheep farm in Nasarawaqa, Bua.

There was always an inkling in 56-year-old Watisoni Sovivikula that his best chance at a meaningful life would be through the land.

Growing up, school was never his strong suit. He was always inclined to be the class truant, regularly missing classes, and opting to participate in other non-curricular activities.

His experiences have been a constant reminder to him to mold and guide his children towards becoming the best versions of themselves. Now residing in Vuniuto Settlement in Nasarawaqa, Bua, Mr. Sovivikula had made a pact with himself to see his children's education through.

"Education was never my thing. I would always run away from classes and

I went through a very hard time growing up. What I went through, I promised myself that my children should never go through the same, and so I strived to provide them the best," he said.

This promise he made saw his children excel where he didn't, with two securing employment as health care workers, one as a nurse and one as a caregiver, while his third is employed at the iTaukei Lands Trust Board (iTLTB), with one of his twin sons currently studying at the Fiji National University and the other twin opting to assist their old man on the family farm.

"It hasn't been an easy journey. The only thing I saw potential in was the land, and I knew it was the only thing that could fulfill my wishes."

Before he fully committed to the land, he only practiced subsistence farming in the village, and this led to him purchasing a house in Labasa for his children's education.

"I took my whole family to Labasa in 2003 and while there I bought a table in the market and traded yaqona; buying and selling it to accommodate for my kids' tuition and other family needs."

"My Labasa goal was completed when my eldest graduated from nursing school in 2009, I then revisited the farm to continue what I have always loved doing, farming.

He applied to lease their vacant Matakali land; "Although I had a table in the Labasa market, I kept thinking of the land as I could attain and develop and gain more if I cultivated it myself, that's when I decided to lease the expired Matakali land," he said.

After the 71.7 hectare land lease was approved, he started with an initial stock of 10 goats, 10 beef cattle, and 5 sheep. In 2006, an opportunity presented itself, and without hesitation, he applied for the Farming Assistance Scheme under the Land Resources Planning and Development for his expired Matakali lease.

In 2008, he was assisted with \$15,000 grant under the Farming Assistance Scheme for the development of the said lease.

"I visited the Land Resource Planning and Development division of the Ministry of Agriculture for advice and they helped me with my papers and the land."

The \$15,000 from the Farming Assistance Scheme was used on his land with \$5,000 used to pay off the land

lease to the iTLTB and the remaining \$10,000 used for his farming needs.

When the land arrears were settled and the title was transferred under his name, he began working on his vision, with the assistance of his friend Gyan Singh.

"He is the son of the former land tenant and he looked after the land and the livestock while I am in Labasa and in 2017 I managed to build a home on the piece of land and moved my family down here."

Meanwhile, in 2018, shortly after he had settled down on the farm, the Ministry of Agriculture assisted Watisoni with his livestock fence and goat house materials.

Over the years, his livestock increased, and although Nasarawaqa is famous for its Talasiga land, Watisoni tried his hand at planting yaqona on it, with his crop now a year and 5-months old.

"At present, I have 40 goats, 30 beef and 15 sheep, the stock should have been bigger now but because of theft and attacks from dogs, it has affected the growth of my stock.

"This place is not ideal for planting yaqona but I tried it anyway, as I moved inland and planted some of my yaqona in Namuavoivoi," he said.

The road is another hindrance in his farming endeavor, as he has been enduring the hardship of the rough and rugged terrain for years.

"Added to the river that rises during heavy downpour is the problem of our road access, we have the urge to plant and to become commercial but the road access is pulling us back but if we were

to be assisted inland, it would be a great help.

"These challenges are part and parcel of farming and I face it with a positive outlook, but I have to keep going.

Additionally, being an elder of Matakali Veikurakura, he's responsible for the development of his clansman; "This settlement is home to 5 families, and because of the childhood I had, I made it my business to shoulder the responsibilities of these children, and just like my children, I also want a future for them," he said.

"I always advise them not to underestimate the value of education and to keep pursuing it, while remembering the most important one, which is to remember their families when they have succeeded."

"I've also reminded my clan members to use money wisely for the development of each family, the farm, and the settlement."

"If you grew up with a silver spoon in your mouth, remember that there are others who are not fortunate enough and in one stage in life you will have a family of your own and you'll need to feed them," he said.

Watisoni's advice is simple, making the right decision is vital to achieving one's success, but should all else fail, look to the land.

"If you are finding it difficult, the land is always an option, make use of the opportunities education has provided but remember whether you succeed or not, the land is always there for your health and financial support.

Goat Farming For Cash

BREEDS

ANGLO NUBIAN

Meat and milk breed

- Long deep body, convex nose.
- High fertility rates.
- Well adapted.
- Good mothering ability.
- Large pendulous floppy ears.
- Coat is fine and glossy.

BOER

Mainly meat

- Large size and doubled muscled.
- Fast growth rate and high carcass quality.
- Docile and high fertility rates.
- Superior mothering ability.
- Mostly white body and brown head.
- Most of Fiji's goats will be a result of crosses of these two main breeds.

REPRODUCTION & GROWTH

The profitability of a goat enterprise depends on the number of animals sold for either meat or as breeding stock.

- Proper management of the flock is important and this includes around the pregnancy and kidding period (when female goats give birth).
- The mother will need to be strong and healthy in order to deliver healthy kids and also produce enough milk for those kids.
- Sometimes this will mean providing supplementary feed to increase the weight and body

condition of the doe, particularly if the doe is underweight or skinny.

- Females that have a normal body condition have a higher chance of getting pregnant and successfully giving birth to live kids than female goats that are too skinny or too fat.
- Female goats are pregnant for an average of 150 days.
- Also important to recognise that in pregnant does, nutrition during the last 6 weeks of pregnancy is important as 70% of fetal (baby) growth occurs during this time.
- Poor doe nutrition can result in poor colostrum production, low birth weight of kids and increased death losses as a result of weak kids.
- Important proper nutrition is provided during pregnancy.

One method of possibly increasing the chances of female goats getting pregnant is by flushing:

This involves increasing the level of nutrition 2-3 weeks before breeding. This is done by giving good quality pasture or supplements to bring the body condition score of the doe to 3 - 3.5/5. It is important that newborns suckle and drink an adequate amount colostrum (first milk) soon after birth.

Weak kids may need to be bottle-fed. Similarly, does not interested in their kid[s] may need to be milked and kids bottle-fed - repeat 4 - 5 times a day; the kid's appetite should be

satisfied but do not force them to drink. Poor doe nutrition can result in poor colostrum production, low birth weight of kids and increased death losses as a result of weak kids.

MATING CAN BE DONE THROUGH 2 MAIN WAYS:

Hand Mating - Does on heat identified through teaser bucks. Doe allowed to mate with the buck in a pen. Mating season may reach up to 21-42 depending on the does on heat
Paddock Mating - Bucks and does are left to mate freely in the paddocks. A ratio of 1 buck: 20 - 30 does is used. A period of 21 days is allowed for paddock mating.

CARE OF NEWBORN KIDS

The objective of newborn kids management is to minimize deaths and enhance health and performance. In most cases, does will take care of their kids with minimal input from the farmer. However, farmers should be prepared to assist if necessary or contact the Ministry for necessary help and advice.

Some common care and management practices to increase the survival and growth of newborn kids include:

Make sure they are breathing. A piece of grass can be gently inserted up a nostril to stimulate breathing if kid is weak.

Keep newborns warm and dry and this is very important during wet, rainy & cold weather to reduce deaths. Dip the umbilical cord and navel in

iodine solution to reduce the risk of bacterial infections entering the body.

MANAGEMENT OF NEWBORN KIDS

Some common recommended management practices for newborn kids:

Fostering (kids puts on a different mother).

May be required for a number of reasons especially if the mother rejects the kid[s].

Should be attempted before bottle-feeding kids, the closer it is to birth the better.

Several techniques of achieving this:

Rub the new kid in the placenta of the does' own kid. If doe rejects, place the does head in a head gate to prevent her from pushing the kid away when it tries to suckle.

Keep the doe and kid in a pen until it is certain the doe has adopted the kid.

CASTRATIONS:

- Performed to remove unwanted traits, faster growth rate for fattening stock, and make wild/aggressive animals easier to handle.
- Age: as young as possible and before 12 weeks of age.
- The older the animal, the greater the risk of complications of surgery.
- Important that it should be done by a trained individual,

otherwise seek assistance from Ministry staff to castrate the kids.

EAR TAGGING:

- Used for the identification purposes and applied when kids are a few days old.
- Animal tags can be bought from the Ministry's AH&P locality offices.

VACCINATIONS

- Vaccinations are recommended to be administered to your animals at the appropriate ages and at the appropriate times (initial and booster injections).
- This provides immunity against certain important diseases for goats and sheep.
- Please consult with a Ministry AH&P staff or veterinarian for more information and if you are interested in vaccinating your flock.

