

ANASA TAKES PRIDE IN FARMING



Anasa Tawake at his dalo farm in Sakoca.

Coming out of your comfort zone and choosing a lifestyle you're unaccustomed to can be a tough ask for a lot of people. Some are spurred towards this decision out of necessity and the realization that a different lifestyle will benefit them and their loved ones. As the head of a household, 49-year-old Anasa Tawake of Kalabu Village in Naitasiri made a decision that surprised many who were close to him. He gave up what would take up his time and money, and used the resources available around him for the benefit of his family. "I used to see my father farm but I wasn't really bothered to follow in his footsteps. "Until I had a family of my own, it was then that I knew I had to do something that would cater for the needs and wants of my family," he said. Anasa as privileged as he was,

being a part of a big Mataqali (land owning unit) and receiving land lease money, had initially failed to grasp the opportunities available to him through agriculture. "People are often comfortable with what they received and lived off of, it isn't a bad thing, but we also have to think of days that it does not come or when circumstances change, there needs to be a backup plan." "I thought hard and deep about what I needed to do, where I am now wouldn't have been how it looks today had it not been for that one decision I made all those years ago," he smiled. "Starting was hard, I stayed home and farmed, my motive was to move from subsistence to being a commercial farmer," said Anasa. In the first 3 years following his shift in focus, Anasa gave up the unruly and addictive leisurely activities that plagued him and

which would be a hindrance to his plan. "When I started, I really didn't have much cash with me and I usually relied on others to buy the things that I was addicted to, like grog, cigarettes and alcohol, I also didn't bother with attending any family functions or meeting my communal obligations and opted to stay by myself, excusing myself to always stay on the farm," he shared. "In 2012, that's when I wholeheartedly committed myself, I reserved myself from all those and for starters, I planted 5,000 dalo suckers, and ginger for practice purposes as well as cassava on our vacant Mataqali land." His ambitions inevitably bore fruit, and his perseverance grew with his dalo, ginger and cassava. From the initial start-up, he now has 133,000 dalo suckers on the ground, a number which is exclusive of the dalo he has already harvested in the past. "I'm farming on my Mataqali Nawavatu land in Sakoca which has dalo and tavioka and also at the Mataqali Naulukaroa's piece of land in Veikoba where I am also planting ginger and dalo," he said. "I chose dalo because of the suitability of the land and it takes 6-8 months to mature and the availability of the market and the manpower available to me at any given time." "In 2019, we earned \$100,000.00 from tausala and \$70,000.00 from ginger, I'm not boasting about my achievements but am merely expressing the result of my labor from the land and I am extremely proud of it," he smiled. Anasa also has 9,000 yaqona plants planted and each year he sets targets for planting and harvesting. "The harvest from the cassava which earns us \$300 weekly is

designated for home, my family and my children's needs while the revenue collected from dalo and ginger is saved for investments," said Anasa. "Having either commercial or subsistence also comes down to good record-keeping and setting targets and if the target of the year is not achieved, always keep trying," he encourages. Anasa's good-will has not only been within his immediate community members and families but has extended to Natila Village where he regularly preaches the importance of cultivating the land. "Sharing your knowledge is important as it will help uplift the lifestyle of people, with my experience on farming I have assisted in the development of the church in the Kalabu Circuit, and have also advised working people to think of alternative work to supplement their current jobs as we are currently facing uncertainties," he said. "During any informal gathering or over a bowl of grog, I always advise about the importance of farming and to take their cue from our fellow Fijians of Indian descent as a good example in the usage of land," he said. "We can learn a lot from them, invest and keep developing, we are land owners therefore we need to make use of our own land, advance from subsistence to commercial farming." The ever ambitious highlander has plans to venture into real estate, and should you commute along Khalsa road in Suva, it's impossible to miss a newly constructed wooden house that's a sight to see and marvel at, all part and parcel of his future plans. "One of our plans was to build a house and to rent it, and as of now that house has been constructed and everything is now falling into

place, just as planned, with that all set-up, I am now planning to build houses and to have these houses rented out as an extra source of cash," he said. The close-knit Tawake family in Khalsa are witnesses to the impact farming has brought forth, which has berthed a vision to venture into real estate and has also seen Anasa provide for his family's needs and material wants, some of which include the purchase of a Toyota Land Cruiser and Hilux and has also helped fund the extension of their family home. "Money does not grow on trees and I can confidently say that all I have achieved was made possible from perseverance and farming." "I am glad and I must thank the Lord for the decision I made 8 years ago as I am now reaping the hardships I persevered through, they were not easy but it is all worthwhile," he said. As a result of his dedication, Anasa won the Dalo Farmer of the Year award during the National Agriculture Show in 2019. "When you are walking with the Lord, your hard work will never go unnoticed, and toiling the land comes with practice, and with the technical advice and coordination I received from the Ministry of Agriculture, I have prospered greatly. "Everyone loves the high city life but to engage in farming in the suburbs is fascinating, as you are not only an inspiration but also a food provider to your community." "From that perseverance and determination I can now proudly say that I no longer need to rely on anyone to spend their hard earned money on my wants as I can do that myself," said Mr. Tawake. "I am solely responsible for my family's needs now and I can proudly answer the call of my Church, my family and the vanua.

STANDARD REQUIREMENTS FOR DALO EXPORT

COMPONENT	USA	NEW ZEALAND	AUSTRALIA
Shape	Uniform oval shape and plumb without segments unduly elongated, crooked or having peanut shape.	Uniform oval shape and plumb without segments unduly elongated, crooked or having peanut shape.	Uniform oval shape and plumb without segments unduly elongated, crooked or having peanut shape.
Cutting of tops	Must be trimmed down to 2 inches long with older petioles removed	Must be trimmed down to 2 inches long with older petioles removed	Must be trimmed down to 2 inches long with older petioles removed
Size	Corms must be above 1kg and not more than 3kg. A tolerance of 10% (wt basis) is allowed for taro less than 1kg but above 750g; (750-950kg)	Corms must be above 1kg and not more than 3kg. A tolerance of 10% (wt basis) is allowed for taro less than 1kg but above 750g; (750-950kg)	Corms must be above 1kg and not more than 3kg. A tolerance of 10% (wt basis) is allowed for taro less than 1kg but above 750g; (750-950kg)
Freshness pre-harvesting time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Well maturedHarvested 1- 2 days earlierMust be fresh without and shrivelling or discoloring of tops and flesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Well maturedHarvested 1-2 days earlierMust be fresh without any shrivelling or discoloring of tops and flesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Well maturedHarvested 1-2days earlierMust be fresh without any shrivelling or discoloring of tops and flesh
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Eating quality must be excellent.Wet or rouka taro cannot be accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Eating quality must be excellent.Wet or rouka taro cannot be accepted	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Eating quality must be excellent.Wet or rouka taro cannot be accepted
Injuries	Free from internal or external soft rot and any other decay or worm holes, cuts or breaks.	Free from internal or external soft rot and any other decay or worm holes, cuts or breaks.	Free from internal or external soft rot and any other decay or worm holes, cuts or breaks.

