



AUNTY FI BULLDOZES PAST FELLOW MALE FARMERS IN YAQONA PLANTING OUTPUT



Finau Wong at her farm in Ovalau.

The fact that she does more on her farm, than any of the other men in her cluster, has 66-year old Finau Wong respected by those who know of her on Ovalau Island in the Lomaiviti Group.

Like other farmers, Aunty Fi, as she is fondly referred to, religiously follows a strict timetable like clockwork. That is her number one principle in life – time management.

Farming runs in her blood as her father was also a farmer. Her mother was from Koro, Lomaiviti while her father was Chinese; from the motherland.

She took up planting after she retired from full time employment and gave it her undivided attention after her husband passed away.

Speaking in i-taukei Aunty Fi explained that she planted yaqona, cassava, dalo, pineapple, cabbage, long beans, eggplants, and Chinese pumpkin.

It is indeed remarkable to watch this petite woman, hike about an hour, every day, Monday to Saturday up to her farm located in the steep hills behind her home in Draiba, Levuka.

Her daily routine begins with her feeding her chickens and pigs in the morning, then she prepares lunch for her grandchildren, after they leave for school that is when she prepares to go to her farm, taking her lunch too as she will be there the entire day, cleaning, clearing, and planting till she returns in the afternoon.

While some may find the fact that Aunty Fi is the only woman in her small group of cluster farmers, she on the other hand, does not think it is a big deal.

Her cluster, like other clusters had set a target to plant 1,000 yaqona plants

every year for three years. Today, she has achieved that three-year target with more than 3,000 yaqona plants already in the ground.

For her, farming is where her interest lies and that is all there is to it.

Aunty Fi thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for providing building materials for her farm house and yaqona planting materials that has now expanded due to her daily commitment.

Aunty Fi's message to other women was simple: time management was vital and if you do not have anything to do, go outside and plant. She urged women not to drink too much kava, instead, spend time farming as that was more useful.

She was assisted under the Ministry of Agriculture's Yaqona Development Programme whose objective is to improve infrastructure development to support household livelihoods and commercial agriculture. Infrastructure development meant providing farmers with farm shed, nursery materials, water tanks, and planting materials.

GROWING YAQONA FOR CASH

Recommended varieties

All 13 yaqona varieties in Fiji are Noble Varieties that are preferred for human consumption.

- Loa Kasa Balavu
- Loa Kasa Leka
- Vula Kasa Balavu
- Vula Kasa Leka
- Qila leka
- Matakaro Balavu
- Yonolulu
- Damu
- Yalu
- Qila Balavu
- Dokobana Vula
- Matakaro leka
- Dokobana loa

Seed Rate

2,500 mounds/ha (3-5 cuttings/mound)

Planting Time

Yaqona can be planted all the year round and the best time to plant is from August to October

Spacing:

Traditional System: the wider spacing of yaqona allows for intercropping as it is a shade loving crop.

Between rows: 2m

Plants within rows: 2m

Fertilizer

a) NPK: 13:13:21 200kg/ha. Basal application of 30g with soil per mound at planting.

b) Urea: Apply 30g with soil per mound 4 months after planting.

Ministry of Agriculture does not necessarily recommend fertilizer on yaqona, this is done to supplement growth and development at some stages based on soil nutrient deficiencies.

- It is imperatively recommended to

have the soil analysed before fertilizer application.

- Yaqona grows well on new fertile soil with high organic matter.
- Clay loam soil is better with good drainage.
- Soil analysis should be done during site selection.

Weed Control/ Management

Hand weeding is highly recommended, this depend on the age of the crop, and the season of the year. Yaqona farmers exercise their discretion on yaqona weeding.

Disease Control/Management

Kava Die Back Disease: caused by Cucumber Mosaic Virus (CMV) and transmitted by sap sucking insects such as Aphids. Plants wilt from the top and goes right to the base of the plants. Infected plants will re - generate new plants at the base, but these are all infected and must be removed.

- Use traditional growing methods like clean stem cuttings, enough shading for the young plants at the first 6 months of growth.
- Remove and destroy infected plants by burning and burying.
- Grow yaqona on new soil, with no history of dieback disease.
- Inter-crop with crops such as dalo-ni-tana, coconuts, banana, cassava, yams and sweet potato.
- Avoid planting host plants such as Cucurbits plants (pumpkin, cucumber and watermelon), Solanaceous plants (tomato, capsicum, chillies, eggplant and tobacco), leguminous plants, pineapple, erythrina (drala) and weeds like mile-a-minute and commelina.

Source clean and healthy planting materials from non-infected areas and non - infected plants within the farm.

- Farmers are encouraged to venture into raising yaqona seedlings in nursery as this provides a better selection of clean seedlings at 3 – 4 months before planting.

Insect Control/ Management

No major insect pests.

Farmers are advised to keep watch of Rose Beetle attack on the leaves. Normally at night, this can reduce the surface area on the leaves for food production.

Harvest/ Yield/Food Value

Harvest after 3-4 years from planting. It can be left in the field for up to 6 – 10 years.

Fresh kava roots contain an average of 80% water. Dried roots approximately contain 43% starch, 20% dietary fibre, 15% kava lactones, 12% water, 3.2% sugars, 3.6% protein and 3.2% minerals.

Yield (Dry)

4 to 6kg of green kava is required to produce 1 kg of dried kava. It is estimated that 4,000 – 4,500 tonnes of dry weight kava is produced in Fiji annually and about 3,300 – 3,700 tonnes of dry weight (82%) is consumed in the domestic markets.

Kavalactone Content

The physiological effects of kava are usually viewed as an important characteristic of kava quality amongst customers, alongside characteristics such as where it was grown, taste and cleanliness. The effect of the kava drink is determined by chemicals called kavalactones. There are 6 major kava lactones namely Kavain,

Methysticin, Yangonin, Dihydro kavain, Dihydromethysticin and Desmethoxy yangonin.

The chemotype or kavalactone profile in the laboratory is then determined by ranking the proportions of six kavalactones from highest to the lowest

amount (i.e. in descending order). For example, kava with a chemotype of 426531 has high concentrations by kavain (KAV), followed in decreasing concentrations by dihydro kavain (DHK), methystiin (METH), dihydromethystiin (DHM), yangonin (YAN) and desmethoxy yangonin (DMY).



Yaqona nursery