



## INDUSTRIOUS GAYATRI IS AT HOME IN NACOBO, LOVONI, OVALAU



Gayatri on her farm.

Gayatri with her children and the small canteen in the background.

*I-taukei* have land and if you are lazy and not make use of it, then you will not achieve anything.

Those are the words of wisdom of Gayatri Mala Vocea, 35, who lives in Nacobo Village, Lovoni, on the island of Ovalau in the Lomaiviti Group.

"Farming is good because it can

keep you healthy at the same time, women can help provide food on the table," she said.

Gayatri's husband is from Nacobo Village and she has been living there for the last two years with her four children. She on the other hand, hails from Dreketi, Vanua Levu.

Speaking a mixture of *i-taukei* and English but mostly *i-taukei*, she said she moved to Nacobo, after her mother-in-law became sick and they went to help look after her.

In that time, she managed to start a little farm of her own growing corn and vegetables, especially those that are consumed

by Fijians of Indian descent, such as bitter melon (karela), Sponge melon (toroi), and Okra (bhindi).

It is interesting to note that Gayatri stands out not only due to her lineage and living in an *i-taukei* village, but also that she is industrious and is able to identify what type of vegetables she should grow that will sell fast. Hence, the reason she has targeted the particular vegetables consumed by Fijians of Indian descent.

Due to her vegetable farm, she was assisted by the Ministry of Agriculture with a rotavator to till her land as part of her land preparation before farming.

"Women do not need to rely on their husbands, they can also find ways to provide for their families especially their children," she said.

She was also recognized during the Ovalau/Motoriki Day and was awarded farming implements that helped her in her farm.

At the moment, her vegetable farm is at a standstill after the latest cyclone of TC Ana destroyed her crops. But, that has not deterred

her from continuing her farm and will do so, as soon as the weather clears up.

Gayatri is industrious because she also creates art and craft, has just started her livestock farming, with three goats, and does a bit of sewing as well.

The art and craft she dabbles in includes making artificial frangipani flowers and selling these to PAFCO ladies, and artificial picture frames.

She explained that her artificial flowers was always sold out especially during the festive season, as many ordered for their kala-vata wear.

Gayatri also operates a small canteen from her home. Again, she says she tries out all sorts of income-generating activity for the sake of helping put food on the table for her children and family.

Gayatri was assisted under the Ministry of Agriculture's Extension Services and COVID-19 Home Gardening Seeds Distribution Program.

## GROW OKRA FOR CASH

### Varieties

- Clemson Spineless - susceptible to okra galls
- Local Long White
- Dwarf Long Pod
- Local Long green

### Yield

- 15-20 tonnes/ha
- A well-managed crop can produce about 20 tonnes per hectare.

### When to plant

- Okra is a tropical vegetable, which can be grown at any time of the year. Better harvest is achieved during the warm/wet months from October to March. Planting at this time will also take care of the disease called okra galls.
- Where irrigation is available, okra can also be planted during the cool/dry months ensuring a year-round supply.

### Seed Rate

- 8kg/ha

### Spacing

- Furrows to be 1m apart. Plant to be 30cm apart in furrows.
- Place two seeds 30cm apart in rows. Cover seeds lightly with soil.

### Land Preparation

- Two ploughings and two

harrowing are recommended for good soil tilth.

### Fertilizer

- Poultry manure - 10 tonnes/ha. Broadcast and mix well in the soil 2 weeks before planting.
- NPK (13:13:21) - 200kg/ha. Basal application at planting.

Apply 50kg urea per hectare as side dress. Apply 25kg at 4 weeks and another 25kg at 8 weeks after planting.

### Weed Control

- Hand weed or hoe when necessary and practice interrow cultivation.

### Pests Control

*Thrips* – Spray Bifenthrin at 15 to 20ml/16L knapsack  
*Spiny Bollworm, Corn Ear worm & Leaf miners* – Spray Acephate 75% a.i at 20g/15L of water (Acephate is sold as Orthene & Sunthene) or spray Carbaryl (Carbacide) at 18g/10L of water.  
*Rose Beetle* – apply Bifenthrin 15-20ml/16L of water.  
*Aphids* – apply Bifenthrin at 15 to 20ml/16L of water.  
*Snails and Slugs* – use Blitzem Pellets. Burn crop residues.

Crop rotation can also help reduce pest and disease attack.

### Disease Control

Powdery mildew is the main disease of okra. White powdery growths on the upper surface of the leaves can be seen and causes prematurely leaf falls exposing the okra to sunburn, ripen prematurely and does not store well with poor flavour.

### Control

- Spray Benomyl (Sold as Benlate) at 15g/15L of water or Copper at 60g/15L of water or use Kocide at 15-20g/15L of water to prevent fungal infections.
- Okra Galls is associated with climate conditions and affects

the fruits of older plants. To avoid this problem plant Clemson Spineless from October to March or plant other varieties.

- Plant in sunny places with good-air circulation, do not rotate with cucurbits and rotate with crops of different family such as eggplant, beans, and rootcrops.
- Avoid plant a new crop next to the diseased field. Have good weed control and after harvest collect crop debris and burn.

### Harvesting

- The crop starts bearing at 6 to 8 weeks after planting and

harvesting continues for 8-10 weeks.

- Small tender fruits are harvested.

### Return

If sold at \$0.50 to \$0.80/kg a good crop can yield \$10,500/ha.

### Food value

A good source of Dietary fibre, potassium, calcium, magnesium and vitamin C.

### Disaster Risk and Climate Change tips

Good food and income alternative after a disaster, as it grows fast.

