



## NEW BUDGET WILL ALLOW AGRICULTURE TO CONTINUE FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMES FOR FIJIAN



Sereima & Joeli Sereki's home garden at Yavusania Village, Nadi.

The Village Food Security Initiative 50/50 Fruit trees programme under the Ministry of Agriculture has been allocated \$244,000 for the 2021-2022 Financial Year.

Assistant Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Viam Pillay while commending and responding to the 2021-2022 Budget, said the Ministry had emphasized that the nutritional security of all Fijian villages would be ensured and this was made possible through the Ministry's provision of a set of 3x12 fruit tree seedlings to be provided alongside fruit trees to meet their nutritional requirements.

He said since the Fiji Day celebration in 2020, the Ministry introduced the fruit tree initiative whereby 50 villages were identified and supplied with 50 fruit seedlings to plant around their

community.

"The success of this program enabled its continuation into the current financial year ensuring the provision of fruit tree seedlings to villagers and communities throughout Fiji. In June 2021, 50 fruit trees were planted in Taveuni, 25 in Navakawau Village and 25 in Somosomo Village," Hon. Pillay said.

The Assistant Minister also informed Parliament that the on-going Home Gardening initiative of the Ministry had provided more than 34,000 individual seed packs to households in the four geographical divisions.

He said the success of the Ministry's Home Gardening initiative had consequently improved urban and peri-urban home gardens.

As a result, he said, positive

progress had been identified with some households in the Central division.

"For example, in Vatuwaqa, a resident Kitone Tagi, a hotel worker who lost his job said, that his vegetable seeds garden have been feeding his family during this unprecedented times.

"Mr. Tagi was one of the few recipients of the first distribution of seeds from the Ministry when the pandemic started. He further stated that getting food for his family was a challenge and his home garden has enabled him to provide the necessary nutritious meals that his family needed during these trying times.

"Mr. Tagi has since been assisted twice through the home gardening initiative," explained the Assistant Minister.

Another recipient, Hon. Pillay described in Parliament, was Mr Lingam from Nadera who had shared his passion for tolling his quarter-acre residential lot when home gardening seeds were provided to him.

The Assistant Minister said Mr Lingam further expanded his home garden by creating a vertical hanging garden to provide sufficient space.

"He has progressed further by selling surplus harvest from his backyard garden."

Another programme of the Ministry, the Organic Manure initiative has been allocated a budget of \$190,000 with the objective of reducing Fiji's consumption of chemical/synthetic fertilisers to address soil pollution, environmental pollution, biodiversity and safe foods.

He said the organic initiative would be used to develop three composting sites in Central, Northern and Western divisions.

"Proper sheds will be put up to ensure that compost is processed safely in a dry condition reducing chances of leaching.

"This work will expand compost production and sustain future supply of organic fertilisers by the Ministry while part of the budget will be used for in depth comparison studies on the impacts of organic fertilisers on crop/animal health and productivity,

environmental health and on different soils and climate regimes," he said.

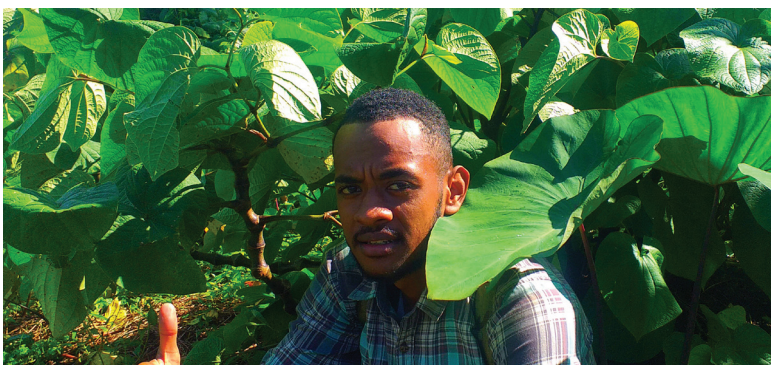
Hon. Pillay said the Ministry was mindful of the need to ensure Fiji's agriculture farming systems and methods were sustainable and conducive to maintaining the ecosystem, waterways and aquatic food sources.

The Assistant Minister congratulated the Minister of Economy and his team for a comprehensive and forward-looking Budget, which in his view augured well for Fiji's future economic development.



Gyan Lingam at his vegetable garden in Nadera

## FARMING KEEPS SERUA YOUNGSTERS BUSY



Maciu Ratavatava



Anare Nagasu Ratuloaloa

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on everyone regardless of colour, creed, ethnicity, or age.

As a result, three students have utilised their time well. When they are not completing worksheets, the trio are seen working tirelessly on their respective farms, sweating it out while endeavouring to help their individual families with food security.

Maciu Ratavatava, 18, of Dravo, Bau, Tailevu with maternal links to Namaqumaqua, Serua, is a Year 12 student of Ratu Latianara College who acknowledges the importance of farming as an alternative form of livelihood.

"Farming is very important as it provides food on the table for my family and it also helps to put money in our pockets," he said.

"I would urge my friends and peers to venture into farming during their spare time as there is no school at the moment and we can help by planting in food for our families especially during these trying times," Maciu added.

Another young man with a strong will, is Meli Taginavolau Rauto, 9, who hails from Namosi village in the Province of Namosi with maternal links to Serua. Meli joins a farming group of five energetic young men, learning farming skills and knowledge.

Meli, who is a Year 4 student of Ratu Latianara Primary school says he enjoys accompanying his group to their respective plantations and to learn from

them. Despite being the youngest of the group, he also has begun his cassava farm.

"Even though I am 9 years old, I have nearly 500 cassava already in the ground," he said.

Meli also acknowledges the importance of farming to his family and its benefits.

"Farming provides food for the family and also money," he said.

Meli certainly has a very bright future ahead of him and contemplates not only becoming a farmer, but a successful one in the future.

Namaqumaqua lad and Year 12 student of Nasikawa Vision College, Anare Nagasu Ratuloaloa with maternal links to Davetalevu, Tailevu echoed similar sentiments.

The 18-year-old also stresses the need to engage in farming as a source of livelihood.

"During this crisis, it is more than important to venture into farming to sustain our families," Anare said.

He also plants dalo, yaqona and cassava during his spare time and learns a lot from his dad who is also a farmer.

"I have planted more than 50 dalo, about 100 cassava plants and a few yaqona plants on my farm," he said.

While farming has kept the lads busy during this pandemic, like other young Fijians they also have aspirations to don the white jersey to represent their country. But for now, they realise the importance of farming for their families' food security and so the learning continues.



Meli Taginavolau Rauto