



COMPOST FERTILISER DELIVERED TO RURAL VILLAGES FOR LONG TERM FOOD SECURITY

Forty villages on Viti Levu are targeted to receive compost fertilizer from the Ministry of Agriculture in the new financial year 2021-2022 with plans to expand the scope to include liquid organic fertilisers, reveals Agronomy Research Team, Senior Research Officer, Dr. Tekini Nakidakida.

"This project will assist small holder farmers to continue farming without the need for chemical fertilisers. The compost fertilizer will sustain their soils and reduce pollution in rivers, streams and coastal areas," Dr. Nakidakida explained.

He said reduction on the reliance of chemical fertilisers would only be realized through 'just transition'.

"It will be easier for small holder farms to make the switch to organic fertilisers. Taking that into consideration and the need to reduce chemical pollution of watersheds, we

chose remote communities or villages in the highlands and along the coast," he enlightened.

He said the rural communities were advised how to apply the finished compost given they were already using manure on their farms.

Dr. Nakidakida added that 40 villages were targeted in the last financial year and distribution was currently underway in the Central and Western Divisions.

"Medium and large scale farms will be targeted in this financial year 2021-22, after more awareness of the need to adapt to sustainable production systems."

Agriculture Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass had said the Organic Initiative of the Ministry targeted to reduce Fiji's consumption on chemical fertilisers, improve soil health and soil carbon, improve soil biodiversity and

sustain agricultural land for long term food security.

He pleaded with farmers to practice sustainable agriculture and not to abusively apply chemical fertilisers.

"Agriculture is very vulnerable to climate change and it is only with Climate Smart Agriculture that we can sustain our food system and socio-economic well-being," Mr. Dass said.

The Permanent Secretary said the Ministry understood the importance of chemical fertilisers and recognized their contribution to the economy, at the same time, it was mindful of protecting and sustaining agricultural soils for long term food and nutrition security.

This project is one of five new programmes of the Ministry announced in the Budget for 2021-2022 called the 'Promotion and Production of Organic Fertiliser Programme' with a funding of \$190,000.



Unloading of compost fertilizer at Delaitoga village.

ANIMAL HEALTH AND PRODUCTION BUDGET SUFFICIENT TO CARRY OUT PROGRAMMES

The 2021-2022 budgetary allocation set aside for the implementation of programmes under the Ministry of Agriculture's Animal Health & Production Division is sufficient to cater for its activities.

While delivering his 2021-2022 Budget Response in Parliament recently, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy briefly explained the funding for some of the capital programmes of his Ministry that were covered in the new budget for the 2021-2022 financial year.

"In 2021-2022 the Beef extension programme has been allocated \$200,000 that will assist 50 farms in

the Western and Northern Division with fencing materials.

"The Dairy Industry Support with the total funding of \$600,000 will focus on assistance to 40 smallholder farmers who will be registered to the formal market and provision of support to 10 identified youth farmers who will be enrolled at Navuso Agriculture Institute to pursue National Certificate in Dairy production," he said.

Dr. Reddy explained the Goat Extension programme which was allocated \$100,000 would be used to assist 20 smallholder farmers with fencing materials and support the eradication programme of diseases in the goat industry.

In relation to the Animal Health and Production Division, Minister Reddy elaborated that the Ministry would continue breeding programmes of small and large ruminants into the next financial year.

"This will include the distribution of brown Swiss bulls and seven Senepol bulls to 12 farmers in the Western Division, supply of 15 Anglo Nubian, 30 F1 crosses and 10 F2 crosses to 50 farmers in the Western and Northern Division and will see the supply of 500 improved pig breeders, 160 indigenous pig breeders to 300 farmers."



Senepol breed (colour brown) for beef and Brown Swiss breed (colour white) for dairy born from Embryo Transfer Technology.

INITIATIVE TAKES US BACK TO OUR ROOTS - VOLATABU



Ms. Kalesi Toga Volatabu sharing the story of Reservoir Road community residents utilising the Home Gardening programme at her small garden.

Seeing the residents of Reservoir Road in Suva nurturing the small bits of land around their homes was a welcome sight for Ms. Kalesi Toga Volatabu.

After the distribution of Home Gardening packages to families in Reservoir Road by the Ministry of Agriculture, it reignited a burning

sensation in these households to grow for their own consumption.

Ms. Volatabu likens it to a return to the roots.

"The feedback has been quite amazing, it is quite, wow!"

"Because it is a great initiative for them because it's literally the first time, as I said, they are so far away from their villages where they live off the land, (whereas) here, they're in the city areas and this has kind of just reminded and taken them back, what it's like to be back in the days where you have to plant for your own food," she said.

"For them it was good, they got to learn how to get up again, how to nurture the land, how to use those seeds and actually have a feel of what it looks like at the end of it when you actually cook the food.

Ms. Volatabu helped to distribute the seeds among the families in her community and she has been receiving a lot of positive reviews and requests for more seeds, acting as an unofficial liaison for the Ministry within her community, a role she has gladly shouldered.

"From the parents to the young children, I still get questions from the parents, they still want more, can I get

some more, can we get some more seeds?" she shares.

"When you go to the markets, you see the end result of what the vegetable looks like but to see what the actual seed looks like in the beginning, it was a huge learning curve for all who were involved here at Reservoir Road.

From the outset, it was evident to Kalesi that the community was in need of such an initiative; "It is awesome because in hindsight where we're at right now, with COVID-19, the climate where we're at, there's so much unemployment, there's uncertainty," she said.

"And what we've found in our community is how the young people and the parents, it's the one thing that got them together, literally, to look at the land and since we were so far away from the rural areas, the villages because we live in the urban areas, the little plots of land that we have it was great that we were able to get those seedlings to teach even our young children what it's like planting your own food and that was quite amazing to see the whole community coming together," explained Ms. Volatabu.

"We ran out of seeds which was quite amazing because it was the one

thing the whole community wanted to do together.

The enthusiasm showed by the residents of Reservoir Road in the Home Gardening initiative is uplifting for Ms. Volatabu, who is also a social worker and founder and Chief Executive of Volatabu Group, which is a non-governmental organization that advocates and creates awareness on drugs and other pressing issues in Fiji.

She has also called on fellow Fijians to utilise any available land beside their houses to grow their own vegetables.

"The greatest advice I can give is if you have a little plot of land, use it. If you don't have land, use buckets and whatnot just to grow your own vegetables and food.

"The reward that it gives is just amazing, it's also a kind of healing process as well because sometimes you're too busy to go and touch the earth, touch the soil and actually plant something and see it grow from a seedling to a plant, it's a huge achievement on your own and it's something you can do on your own without anyone else telling you otherwise.