



DESPISED AGRICULTURE STUDIES TAKES OVER FIRST LOVE OF NURSING



Marie Firomena Kaitu'u on routine check as Meat Inspector at the Fiji Meats Industry Board slaughterhouse in Nakasi.

Leaving the comforts of her island home, the love of her parents, and the familiar company of friends and families, Marie Firomena Kaitu'u travelled 401 miles from Rotuma to Fiji to undertake tertiary education.

Originally from Noa'tau in Rotuma with maternal links to Juju, the then teen-aged Marie had her sights set on joining the nursing profession.

"My dream job was to become a nurse but after completing my secondary education, unfortunately, the nursing 2005 intake was put on hold. Instead, I was advised by our Careers teacher to try other fields,"

she said.

However her family encouraged her to apply for a scholarship as it was the dream of students on the island to come to Fiji for their tertiary studies.

"Agriculture studies was never my option to study because farming was what we did on the island for survival but because the nursing intake was closed I had no other option but to just choose Agriculture," Marie said.

Marie applied for the former Public Service Commission scholarship while she continued to help her parents on the island.

"Names of successful scholarship recipients appeared in the newspapers and because paper deliveries on the island depends on the arrival of ships and planes, we were unaware of the selected names," said Marie.

"Later one weekend we received a call from one of my uncles in Suva who informed my parents that my name was in the newspaper," recalled Marie.

Marie vividly remembered how she despised the news as her heart was still with nursing. Only due to the financial burden on her parents if she continued to pursue

her desires that she reluctantly accepted the scholarship to study Diploma in Tropical Agriculture.

"I left Rotuma to start a new path without my parents and family members and enrolled at the Fiji College of Agriculture (FCA) in Koronivia," she said.

"At Koronivia, I discovered that Agriculture had more branches and I was glad I found out that there is more to just planting and selling," she said.

Marie graduated from FCA in 2007 and was employed as a Farm Hand at the Dairy Farms Fiji Limited in Navua before joining the Ministry of Agriculture in 2010.

"It has always been said that when God closes one door he opens another one with bigger and greater things and we may have our plans but only His prevails," she said.

"I never made it to nursing school, I was disheartened but God showed me another path and this path allowed me to nurse animals," she said.

"Most of my working career was in Dairy, I also got to experience and visit places that while in Rotuma I never thought I would be visiting," she said.

"In the course of my work I had to travel the high seas to get to islands and trek through the forests to get to a particular village."

Marie was a Dairy Industry Support staff for two years before becoming a Temporary Livestock officer based in Navua. She took up the post of a Meat Inspector and moved up the livestock staff ladder becoming a Dairy Inspector before becoming an Agriculture Officer.

"I am mostly mistaken for a Fijian lady so I made an effort to learn the Fijian and the Hindi languages for

field purposes."

"There were experienced people that coached me along the way and added to my newly acquired language. Also, while I was in Navua, we had to walk from Naitonitoni to the PA's office to fax our weekly updates to the Central office," she said with a laugh.

The trip she took to Fiji in 2005 was also the last time she saw her parents and her island home.

"The annual Rotuma Day roadshow of 2014 gave me the opportunity to return home and see my family and friends again, this time as a representative of the Animal Health and Production Division of the Ministry of Agriculture," she smiled with memory.

"I was approached by the former Director Tomasi Tunabuna and grabbed the opportunity"

Marie in her strive to equip and educate herself secured a 3 years NZ Aid scholarship at the Massey University studying Bachelor in Animal Science majoring in Animal Welfare.

"It is an exciting course and I look forward to finishing it but now because of COVID-19 we are released and will resume studies when we have the all-clear," she said.

The Meat inspector who is also the Agriculture Officer in charge of Sheep is now continuing her service to the Agriculture sector.

"Learn from experience people, don't always think you know everything even if you are highly qualified, always stay humble and broaden your mind to learn new things," was the message from Marie.

NATIONAL MOVEMENT NEEDED TO ADVANCE AGRICULTURAL GROWTH



Farmer Vasemaca of Moala in Nadi raises her issues.

Strong and secure agricultural growth is possible through the active engagement of all relevant stakeholders within the sector to ensure that the upward trend in recent growth patterns for the sector are maintained.

With the current COVID-19 pandemic having a strain on Fiji's economy, and seeing as the tourism sector was one of the worst affected, and further exacerbated by the occurrence of natural disasters, there is an urgent need for a national

movement to ensure agricultural growth is advanced and sustained.

This was the message shared to farmers of Paipai and Viseisei Back Road in Lautoka and at Navo in Nadi by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon.

Dr. Mahendra Reddy on Wednesday while conducting informal talanoa sessions with the farming communities there.

"Following COVID-19 the tourism sector came to a standstill (and is still at a standstill) and the situation is still quite bad in terms of economic activity, our borders remain closed, our tourism sector is closed and that is having a major impact on our economy," he said.

"Also, because of this pandemic people are not able to conduct business as they used to, investment and businesses are affected but during this time, the agriculture sector continued to grow, in fact last year compared to 2019 our exports grew by 15% in volume and in value terms it grew by about 25% which is a remarkable achievement," said Hon. Reddy.

"We need to have a national movement for agricultural expansion, we cannot lose this

opportunity where there is a convincing argument and an opportunity for exports as there continues to be massive demand in export markets in the US, Australia and New Zealand," he added.

Farmers were also urged to coordinate and to liaise more closely with the Ministry to better organize and to tap into the export markets more aggressively to ensure Fiji continuously meets its export targets.

Hon. Reddy also urged farmers to constantly discuss avenues to improve their production and to continue to grow their farms because in this process, the agriculture sector will grow in line through their active participation, the farming households will benefit and this fulfils national objectives, and as farmers grow, their production is aggregated, ensuring the country's economy grows with them.