



AGRICULTURE BUDGET FOR NEW FINANCIAL YEAR IS SUFFICIENT: MINISTER REDDY



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy delivering his statement in Parliament.
Photo: Parliament of the Republic of Fiji Facebook page.

The Budget allocation for the Ministry of Agriculture of \$61.9m for the next financial year is sufficient to support programme

activities that will address the impact of COVID-19, says Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra

Reddy while responding to the 2021-2022 Budget in Parliament on Tuesday (27.7.21).

He said other programme

activities the new financial year budget would support included pursuing opportunities to ensure food and income security and sustainable livelihoods for all Fijians focusing on building community resilience in Fiji's Agriculture sector.

The Minister acknowledged the crisis that COVID-19 had brought to Fiji and its impact felt across all sectors, including agriculture.

"The current pandemic has disrupted food supply chains throughout the world creating an unprecedented impact on Fiji's agriculture sector. It has brought vulnerability to the forefront and at the same time create opportunities that the Ministry can capitalize on.

"These opportunities enable the fulfilling of two critical strategic objectives highlighted in the Agriculture Growth and Expansion Plan - (i) securing the country for its food and nutritional requirements and progressively expanding Agriculture to its full potential; (ii) improve livelihood of rural communities, provide employment opportunities and promote sustainable agricultural practices to mitigate climate change issues," Dr.

Reddy said.

He explained the budget of \$61.9m for the new fiscal year would be used to support 83,395 farmers.

"Conversely, with the sugar sector which has been allocated \$72.1m to cater for the need of just over 11,000 sugarcane farmers. This again shows the effectiveness of spend and where we are getting the biggest bang for our buck," he said.

Dr. Reddy said a total of 70,991 farming household was recorded during the 2020 Fiji Agriculture Census (FAC) compared to 65,000 recorded in 2009.

He said this indicated that more people were resorting to agriculture as their source of livelihood hence the Ministry was committed to review and refine its approaches to meet this upsurge.

The Minister commended the Minister for Economy for an excellent and comprehensive Budget that would support economic recovery, rejuvenate private sector activity, protect jobs, assist the unemployed and maintain overall macro-fiscal sustainability.

WESTERN FARMERS FIRST TO RECEIVE BACK TO RURAL AGRICULTURE FARM KITS

Ten farmers from the Western Division became the first recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture's Back to Rural Agriculture (B2RA) programme, from the total of 370 that have been confirmed to receive the assistance.

Two farmers from Rakiraki, four from Tavua, two from Nadi and two from Sigatoka recently received the Back to Rural Agriculture farm support kits from the Ministry staff.

While officiating at the virtual handing over of the farm support kits, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the main objective of the program was to support Fijians who had lost their jobs due to the current pandemic and were now returning to the rural areas to focus on agriculture.

"We are handing over these kits to the ten pioneering recipients that were finalized after we went through a total of 8,147 applications," said Dr. Reddy.

He said from the total applications received, 4,273 were from the Central Division, 3631 from the West, 161 from Eastern, and 82 were from the Northern Division.

"As expected, close to 90per cent applications were from the Central and Western Divisions that felt the full force of the pandemic," the Minister said.

Dr. Reddy said there was an overwhelming response for this particular package and it demonstrated that Fijians were now willing to go back to the rural areas and utilize the vacant land for agricultural expansion which was

in line with the Ministry's Strategic Plan to expand and utilise land to expand agriculture for commercial use.

"We are pleased to see that about 25per cent (1,886) of the applicants were female employees that had lost their jobs and were willing to resort to agriculture not only to support their livelihoods but in turn support the Ministry's vision to expand agriculture."

Meanwhile, speaking on behalf of the 10 farmers, Ms. Salanieta Marseu of Waqadra, Nadi thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for the support in helping farmers to be a part of the program.

The \$400-package includes \$250 worth of farm implements and equipment, \$50 cash and \$100 worth of planting materials. The farm materials and equipment includes a farm knife, a digging

fork, one digging spade, a 20L water bucket, one Jerry Can (Water Can), an axe, one 50 meter rope, a tarpaulin set, and one set of shade cloth.

The Ministry will continue to hand over the farm support kits to the other 360 recipients in the coming weeks.



Salacieli Rokomina from Togovere Village Ra with his farm support kit.



Leba Pijila Raivola Moce from Namara Saivou Ra with her farm support kit.



ATO Nadi Vinay Sami (right) with the B2RA farm support kit recipient Krishnil Sumeet Vikash of Navo, Nadi.