



## NORTHERN RICE FARMERS SET PRECEDENT



A Combined Rice Harvester on demonstration.

The Ministry of Agriculture's 'We Rice Up' programme has gathered momentum with farmers from the Northern Division setting the precedent.

This shift in focus to increasing rice yields and overall production was spurred on through the commitment and partnership between farmers, Ministry officials and key stakeholders to return Fiji's rice industry to its glory days.

With rice harvesting currently ongoing across the country, the Ministry of Agriculture had deployed its resources to expedite the entire harvesting process at a fraction of the cost to farmers, and in light of the demand for machinery through the operation of these public-owned rice harvesters, some farmers had their fields harvested at night.

In the province of Macuata alone, 337.08 hectares were put under rice cultivation from just 6 districts with a total of 674.87 metric tonnes of rice being produced altogether. The Ministry of Agriculture, in turn, provided 652.1 hours to harvest this total rice yield from the 6 districts of Labasa, Wailevu, Dreketi, Sasa, Mali and Nadogo.

For Suren Prasad of Coqeloa in Labasa who was able to harvest 0.6 metric tonnes of rice, the provision of the rice harvester at his farm showed the dedication by the Ministry to the farmers; "I was happy to receive them that evening and they worked hard to harvest all of my rice

at that time, and during curfew, I am very happy and thankful to the Ministry for the assistance," he said.

Echoing similar sentiments, 52-year-old Daven Sami of Nagigi lauded the efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture officials for committing to the farmers' needs.

"I planted a lot of rice because my cane got damaged and I opted to take up rice farming. The rice harvester was very good and I thank the Ministry because they came at the right time because my rice had been over matured and I was worried that it could have gotten damaged again if there was any flash flooding because this place is low-lying," said Mr Sami.

"I believe the subsidized cost of hiring the rice harvesters is a big help to us farmers, I would usually pay more than \$1,000 for labour costs to harvest my rice but for this assistance by the Ministry, it only cost probably \$150-\$200," he added.

Mr Sami's 6-acre rice farm was harvested on the evening of Sunday 30th May whereby he managed to seal and pack 180 bags of rice paddy, approximately 4 metric tonnes worth, to be sold to Fiji Rice.

Meanwhile for 70-year-old Rup Narayan of Waiqele whose rice was harvested on the evening of 9th June praised the Ministry of Agriculture for providing the helping hand that enabled him to harvest approximately 2 tonnes of rice.

"This has been a great help for me

and I would like to encourage others to go into rice farming," said Mr Narayan.

The 'We Rice Up' programme was launched by Prime Minister Hon. Voreqe Bainimarama earlier this year on 1st April at Bavu Village in Nadi whereby he emphasized the need to produce more rice locally as Fiji, on average, imported 40,000 tonnes of rice annually, equating to about \$40million worth of rice grown in places like South East Asia, that ended up on the dinner tables of Fijian families.

The 'We Rice Up' programme promotes growing local rice for food security, whereby the Ministry will supply the seeds and assist with land preparation, and provides a platform for farmers to gain the technical know-how and machinery to become adequate rice farmers.

Aerobic rice is a renewed way of growing rice in non-submerged conditions in aerated soils. Aerobic rice is grown like any other crops such as Maize or Sorghum on dry land and rainfed soils. Varieties adapted to aerobic management systems require the ability to maintain rapid growth in soils with moisture content at or below field capacity.

The Gross Margins for rice cultivation ranges from an estimated yield of rice variety at 8tonnes per hectare and with an estimated price at \$0.80/kg should fetch an attractive \$6,400.00 per hectare.

## FARMERS' REGISTER INTEREST FOR CASH FOR CULTIVATION PROGRAMME

As of earlier this week, more than 5,000 farmers have registered with 983 applications approved for the second phase of the 'Cash for Cultivation' programme so far under the Ministry of Agriculture and in partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

The roll-out which had begun last week ended this week and as of close of business on Tuesday (8.6.21), 5,406 farmers were registered.

Ministry of Agriculture, Permanent Secretary, Mr Ritesh Dass explained the breakdown of the Divisions of where the 983 applications that were approved were located.

"From the Central Division 408 farmers have been approved, from the West, 358 farmers will receive the assistance, from the North, 20 and from the Eastern Division, 197 farmers. This means, that these 983 farmers have been approved to receive their first tranche payment. So far, 36 farmers have been approved to receive to their second tranche," he said.

Mr Dass said Agriculture officers had so far conducted 1,217 verification exercises based on the information given by farmers.

Attending the registration exercise at Dravo on Tuesday (8.6.21) was farmer from Waicoka, Bau, Mr Taniela Vuli, 29,

who explained in *i-taukei*, that he and other farmers arrived early in the morning to ensure they registered after seeing how busy the Nausori Agriculture Office was last week.

He said he was glad that the decision was made to register farmers by Districts, hence it was Bau and Dravo's turn that Tuesday.

Mr Vuli said the process was efficient and completed quickly, and he was happy.

He had already applied for other assistance from the Ministry like planting materials but it was the first time he was applying for the 'Cash for Cultivation' programme.

Attending the registration exercise at Nakaikoga Primary School in Rewa, was Mr Sikeli Bukarau, from Naselai, Rewa and residing in Sawarua, Lokia.

Also speaking in *i-taukei*, Mr Bukarau said the entire process was smooth and fast, with the service also commendable, compared to Nausori where there was a long line of people.

He said he would take the form home, complete it and return it. It was his first time to seek assistance from the Ministry.

In announcing the assistance recently, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy explained when farmers registered their

interest, Agriculture officers would then visit and examine the farmers' one-acre piece of land, which would be used to cultivate either vegetables or root crops.

When the verification of the land was completed, a first tranche payment of \$75.00 would be facilitated through ADRA to help the farmer prepare and cultivate the new field. Following the completion of the exercise, ADRA and Agriculture officials would again monitor the progress and evaluate the farming activity before the farmer was paid the balance of \$125.00 as part of the second tranche payment.



Taniela Vuli (left) and Osea Koroi (right) after registering at Dravo.



Farmers from Dravo and Bau Districts waiting their turns to register for the Cash for Cultivation programme