



REVITALISING THE COCONUT INDUSTRY A KEY PRIORITY AREA FOR AGRICULTURE MINISTRY



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment – Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy with farmers at Sariyawa.

Returning the coconut industry to its former glory days remains a key priority area for the Ministry of Agriculture.

With 2021 being declared the Year of the Coconut, there are programmes spearheaded by the Ministry of Agriculture to help revive the coconut industry and increase the geographical concentration of coconut supplying areas as an attempt to re-establish coconut as a viable and lucrative option for farmers nationwide.

This was highlighted to farmers from Qeleloa, Uciwai and Sariyawa in Nadi yesterday (Wednesday 10/03/21) by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during informal talanoa sessions organized with farmers of Nadi.

“If you want to plant Coconut, please express your interest and we will supply the planting material. This year has been declared as the Year of Coconut and we are trying our best to revive the Coconut industry.

“At the moment, coconut planting is largely being concentrated and being harvested from the Northern Division, particularly from Cakaudrove province and we want to advance the coconut industry by increasing the number of coconut growing areas to help sustain the industry,” said Hon. Reddy.

Minister Reddy said upon a farmer’s indicated interest to grow coconuts, the Ministry would provide the required planting material at no cost to the farmer.

On a separate note, he also elaborated on the need for farmers to consider planting pigeon pea and rice to help ease the burden of meeting the dietary needs and food requirements of families, as all of these agricultural programmes were simultaneously geared towards ensuring the food security of all Fijian households.

Minister Reddy also heard of various concerns raised from these farming communities, with similar discussions held across the country recently to help address the immediate issues that were a deterrent to the development and growth of farming clusters and individual farmers respectively.

DAIRY EXPANSION VITAL TO BOOST MILK PRODUCTION

Seven new cluster dairy farmers in Waidina, Naitasiri were established in the last few weeks as part of the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts to not only boost milk production to meet market demand but also to improve the livelihoods of dairy farmers.

Permanent Secretary, Mr. Ritesh Dass said the new cluster farmers were set up under the Ministry’s Dairy Industry Support program aimed at also assisting to reduce the national import bill.

“The program was designed to help raise and improve the Fiji Dairy Industry contribution, to increase the overall local milk production and also improve the rural income earning capacities of farmers in Fiji,” he said.

The DIS program has been targeting potential areas with farmers from Waidina, Naitasiri; Sigatoka; and Nayavu, Wainibuka to branch into dairy.

“There is definitely an interest in this

program that will benefit farmers in providing a market that will provide a consistent income,” Mr. Dass said.

The new cluster farmers group recently formed in Waidina are crop farmers interested in diversifying into the dairy sector to boost the industry and encourage to upscale production from farmers, he said.

The Program focuses on providing new dairy sheds for farmers, fencing, water tanks and fodder establishment.

“The assistance is geared to prepare them for a sustainable production and supply of milk in addition to the Central dairy farmers who supply over 60per cent of the total milk supply,” the Permanent Secretary said.

Farmers of the new Waidina Dairy Cluster were trained on infrastructure improvement, record keeping, dairy management practices, milk hygiene, with the provision of the market, and nutritional and pasture improvement.

In addition to training, farmers visited the Koronivia Livestock Unit and dairy farmers in Tailevu.

Gusuisavu farmer, Mr. Naibuka Inakula thanked the Ministry for creating pathways for farmers with livestock.

“We are accustomed to the old ways of farming, and dairy farming was not something that we thought about taking up in Waidina,” he said.

“There is a huge opportunity in taking up dairy farming and the impact it will create to our livelihoods and its contribution to the economy. Therefore, it is vital that we are trained to deliver quality products because we are newly established,” Mr. Naibuka said.

The number of dairy farms in Fiji increased from 987 in 2015 to 1,130 in 2019. The total quantity of milk exported in 2019 was 23,104 kg, worth a total value of \$236,768.



Livestock Extension Officers and farmers at Waidina, Naitasiri.

BE SELF-RELIANT TO SUSTAIN YOUR FARMS, MINISTER REDDY URGES



Farmers at Qeleloa during a Talanoa Session with the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy.

Farmers are being urged to reintroduce traditional farming practices and to implement them where and when it is applicable to help sustain their farming ventures.

This was reiterated by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while meeting with farmers of Qeleloa in Nadi yesterday (Wednesday 10/03/21) during an informal talanoa session held with farmers from the area of Qeleloa and neighbouring communities.

Hon. Reddy shared during the discussions about the agricultural practices of old, stating that though mechanization was the way forward for agricultural development, it had also become evident that a significant number of farmers had developed a culture of dependency.

He said the Government only had a finite amount of resources that could be provided to help rural

Fijian communities at any given time, particularly farming centric ones, as assistance provided was rendered on a programmed and scheduled basis, with certain farmers often missing out on available Government programmes.

“You must practice sustainable models of farming because we are trying our best to meet the demands of farmers; we’ve also outsourced land preparation to contractors to help us meet the huge demand of land clearing requests the Ministry receives on a daily basis,” he said.

“Invest in bullocks and horses to provide that additional power, like how our forefathers did, to help till your land and prepare it for the next planting season, it is rare nowadays, farmers are not as self-reliant as in the past and I urge you to learn from the past and to become more independent.

Minister Reddy recommended that farmers not become too dependent on

Government assistance and to view their farming as a business model.

“Become self-reliant, be a self-starter and don’t depend too much on Government subsidized assistance or development programs, you must promote independence amongst yourselves as a large farming community, only then can you experience a change for the better,” he said.

Meanwhile, Qeleloa advisory councillor Govindama Ramesh thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for all the assistance and development programmes that had been directed towards farmers within the area stating; “the Ministry of Agriculture has been of a great help to our farmers of Qeleloa and we are thankful to the hardworking staff who commit themselves to help us develop our farms,” said Mrs. Ramesh.