



VINAKA VAKALEVU, RA FARMER TO GOVERNMENT



Eroni with his wife, Veniana Kamila and son Eroni Junior making farm work a full family affair in Navai, Nadarivatu.

A Ra farmer planting in the highlands of Nadarivatu has credited the success of his business to the assistance given by the Government.

Eroni Tokalau Qolikitoga, 47, of Nabalasere, Saivou, Ra is a vegetable farmer planting on about five acres at the moment from his total of nine acres of land in Navai, Nadarivatu, Ba.

Speaking in i-taukei, Eroni explained he was assisted in 2017 with a green house, a rotovator, water pump, irrigation set, water tank, manure, drainage, and land preparatory activities.

He said he was very grateful for the Government assistance he received through the Ministry of Agriculture that has allowed him to ensure work on his farm was now a non-stop process.

He added the water pump, generator, water tank and irrigation system have all helped him increase his production.

Eroni has been farming for over 12 years' following in the footsteps of his parents who have since passed on.

He said there were only three of them working on his farm, every day – himself, his wife and their nine-year-old son. He only brings in more help at harvest time.

He also plants potatoes and has been recognized for producing the best in the highlands. He credits that to not using chemicals fertilisers opting instead to stick with poultry manure.

Potatoes are also grown twice a year up in the highlands. Besides green leafy vegetables, he also plants carrots, capsicums, and root crops.

He has regular customers who call him directly for their orders, which he delivers to Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, and Suva.

Farming has enabled him to not only feed his family healthy meals,

but also extend his home, educate his son, and allowed him to put some aside as savings as well.

He plans to buy a vehicle that will allow him to transport his own fresh produce down to his customers. At the moment, he is using a relative's vehicle. But he says, it's not the same as having your own. In addition, he wants to continue extending his home and grow his savings.

Eroni said the best part about farming was being your own boss. But he stressed, time management was critical to the success of his business. Another, he said, was the improved health of his family from including the vegetables they plant in their daily diet. He added, making money from his farm was the icing on the cake.

He said he makes more money during the off-season compared to the dry season where the prices of vegetables dropped. He said during the off-season he would work twice as hard to ensure that his supply was not disrupted. If sales were not good, Eroni explained, he would collect around \$500. But if it was good, he would make twice as more.

He said he always stressed to the youths and even those in the same age, the importance of managing time. He said he would wake up in the morning around 6am and spend the entire day on the farm and only returned in the afternoon. That was his daily schedule.

Eroni said there were challenges as well he faced on his farm which were pests and the weather such as cyclones that damaged his produce. But he has found a way to protect his vegetables, such as placing a covering on the vegetables, which he added, has helped.

Eroni was assisted under the Nadarivatu Development Program which was now re-named the Highlands Farming Program. This new program is included in the Ministry's

2021-2022 Budget with the intention to facilitate the expansion of crop production through infrastructure improvement to potential farming areas in the Provinces of Ra, Ba and Nadroga Navosa.

The objectives of the Highlands Farming Program are to improve market access to the rural farming communities through the provision

of infrastructure development that will stimulate socio-economic growth in terms of mass production of commodities such as dalo, yams, pulses and assorted vegetables; and to modernize agriculture by providing assistance to potential commercial farmers through the procurement of farm machines, agro inputs, draft animals and implements.



Eroni on his farm in Navai, up in the Nadarivatu Highlands.

FARMING, NOT FOR THE FAINT-HEARTED

Her love for farming made her take a bold step and take it up as a full time job.

Elenoa Daunivalu, 45, of Tabusuka Farm located near the zip line in Sabeto, Nadi is a new farmer. She only just began to take up farming on a semi-commercial scale on her recently leased land.

Originally, from Seaqaqa, Macuata, Elenoa has called Nadi her home for the last 20 years. But farming has always been part of her growing up, so taking it up full time was something she was ready to do.

She leased nine acres of land from Na Momo Levu na Tui Sabeto two years ago and at the moment is utilizing only four acres, growing a variety of both long term and short term cash crops. She plants kumala, yams, cassava, lemon grass, long beans, eggplants, bananas, pumpkins, pineapples, and has also harvested corn.

"I harvested kumala and made

\$1,500 from it. My long term plan is to go semi-commercial and I have received advice to concentrate on one or two commodities when I do."

Elenoa urged other women who had yet to take up this venture, to do so.

"Farming is a passion. Farming is not for the faint-hearted. It comes with perseverance and knowing that despite the hardships, you will face it with the belief that you will overcome it. With farming, there will be shortcomings, but overcoming it and moving on is key," she explained.

"It's a very good feeling, when you plant things and you see it growing. It gives me that satisfaction to see things blossoming and coming into fruition," Elenoa said.

"I grew to love it, as we always had a backyard garden when growing up. Farming was something that I inherited from my parents when we moved around

as my dad was a civil servant," she explained.

Like all farmers, she is at her farm by 6am daily, working all day under the scorching sun with breaks taken in between for meals and discussions with her two farm hands, whom she has employed on a full-time basis.

Whilst she has drums filled with water to assist with her farming, she says, it would be convenient for her if she had a drip irrigation system. She has done her research on this and found the ones readily available were not the ones she was after.

She maintains a clean farm and swears by the old proverb 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness'.

Elenoa thanked the Ministry of Agriculture for assisting her with river bank preservation by providing fruit trees valued at \$2,275, soil testing, and advisory services.



Elenoa at her farm in Sabeto, Nadi.