



HYDROPONIC FARMING FOR AMAR

His dream of starting a hydroponic farm dated back to 2014 when he left work as a delivery driver for Courts Fiji Limited based at the Lautoka office.

48-year-old Amar Dass of Drasa, Lomolomo in Lautoka while working to feed his family never gave up on his farming dream and passion.

Resigning in 2014 allowed him to commit himself fully to his farm which had over the years developed from a backyard garden to a large scale vegetable farm.

Amar who grew up harvesting sugarcane married his wife Irene Devi in 1993 and later in 1995, the couple began with a backyard vegetable garden.

With the help of his wife Irene Devi, the couple managed to live their farming dream and support their family.

"My wife is from the Sigatoka Valley and she grew up growing vegetables and she taught me the ropes of crop and vegetable farming.

Years later, the couple expanded their backyard vegetable garden to a large scale operation, purchasing 40 acres of land in Lomolomo in 2007.

Half of their land is under

sugarcane farming while 5 acres is designated for pineapple cultivation, another five acres for assorted vegetables and two acres is dedicated to his four tilapia ponds with rourou growing alongside them.

Experiencing the hardships of labour payments and time management, Amar found a new way to address this challenge by venturing into hydroponics farming.

His first hydroponic garden was a bamboo structured greenhouse, where he grew vegetables such as cabbage, green coral and butter lettuce.

"I found hydroponic farming more sustainable and something organic like bamboo is a natural idea for building structures that will help build a greener future," he said.

Unfortunately, the bamboo hydroponic system was damaged by Tropical Cyclone Evan that hit Lautoka in 2018. This did not deter his farming spirit as he continued with his assorted vegetable farming and supplying to the Lautoka market, exporters and middlemen in the hotel industry.

"This year (2021) we were handed another set of new hydroponics equipment funded



Amar Dass planting cabbage in his hydroponics system.

by Dialogue Fiji and we're thankful to them," he said.

"When you have the passion, despite whatever circumstance you face, things will eventually find their way to you," he shared.

Apart from the farming skills he learnt over time and coupled with technical advice from the Ministry of Agriculture, Amar also utilises the internet to help him with his hydroponic farm.

"In a well-managed hydroponic system, production increases 3 to 10 times in the same amount of space compared

to the ones grown on the ground," he said.

"No weed or pest control is needed when operating a hydroponic system, it is chemical, pest and disease-free."

"Labour is not a necessity as one person can handle all that is needed in the hydroponic system and in my case, I do everything, from checking the water to transplanting, right up to harvest time."

Hydroponics, according to Amar decreases the time between harvest and consumption, which

also increases the nutritional value and uptake for consumers.

Being an individual that started from scratch and who has survived the cruelty of natural disasters, Amar has advised families to start planting their own vegetables for their food security.

"If space is a problem, you can try hydroponics, what it produces can feed your family and if you have land cultivate it for food, make sacrifices and experiment on things, if things go wrong, you can still make it right next time."

PIGS SHIPPED TO MOALA TO IMPROVE ISLAND DIET AND PIG GENETIC

An outer island community in the Eastern Division was assisted with eight pigs to help improve their protein-deficient diet.

The discussion was held between the Minister of Health and Medical Services, Hon. Dr Ifereimi Waqainabete and Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy where the issue of a lack of protein-source for villages on Moala Island, in the Lau Group was raised as a concern.

Agriculture Acting Permanent Secretary, Dr Vinesh Kumar said once the issue was raised they quickly worked out a solution and on Tuesday (21.9.21) evening, eight pigs were shipped to Moala.

"There were six female and two male weaners which are crossbred with local and improved breed from our Pig Breeding facility at Koronivia Research Station. The preferred characteristics of these pigs are that they will adopt well to the micro climate on the island as well as they perform well without formulated feed; formulated feed is a challenge in maritime areas," Dr Kumar explained.

Accompanying the animals, were 20 bags of 25kg of feed (Grower). Dr Kumar explained, while the pigs were bred to

perform well even by scavenging on whatever feed /protein sources were available, the ones transported to Moala were newly weaned from their mothers, as such they would need to be supplemented with the feed until they fully transitioned to the local food.

He said the delivery of the pigs to Moala also meant it would help the farming community in improving their pig genetics as well as their protein source.

"The female pigs will be able to produce an average of 96 piglets in a year. So it should help the community," he said.

He said it appeared the reason the number of pigs in Moala continued to reduce was due to poor breeding practices and fulfilling communal obligations.

"The pigs were equally shared between Naroi and Keteira Villages. Four pigs; three females and one male were given to these villages. The villages were chosen due to their location which is at either ends of the island," the Acting PS said.

He added that the MOA Extension offices on Moala would also provide technical advice on how to properly breed the swine to ensure sustainability.



Pigs ready for shipment to Moala.

Moala has eight villages with a population of 1,231; 358 households, and 268 farmers. The farmers there are more

crop intensive focused, planting mainly dalo and yaqona. The main market for their yaqona is to a Canadian-based company

while their crops are bought by middlemen in Suva.