



## COVID-19 - A SILVER LINING FOR NAVALA FARMER

Imagine resigning from your work, packing up your family's belongings and off you go to start a completely new life. There is no roof over your head to protect you from the elements the very first night of your journey except for a tarpaulin.

Such is the story of Navala farmer, Apolosi Sokia, 43, following a discussion with his wife after feeling the effects of COVID-19 via a reduction in working hours.

Mr. Sokia was a security officer of a major supermarket chain, who worked for two years in its Ba location when the global pandemic hit Fiji.

Recounting his story in i-taukei, Mr. Sokia explained how he and his colleagues were informed by the management that they would be working on reduced hours. He knew

the reduced hours meant reduced wages. A discussion with his wife resulted in the decision to leave his job and move to his village of Navala, Ba to farm.

The day he resigned, was the same day he and his young family had packed all their belongings and left for the village.

Just before reaching Navala Village, his wife stopped them and told them to get off at the land earmarked to start off his farm, instead of going on to the village, about five kilometres away. A small space was cleared, a tarpaulin spread out and that was where they spent the first night of their new life, under the stars.

The next day, Apolosi focused on two main tasks; erecting his



Agriculture Technical Officer Ba, Isei Nabitu (right) with Apolosi (black tshirt) with Navala villagers on Apolosi's farm.



Apolosi Sokia weeding on his farm.

makeshift home made from the same tarpaulin as well as roofing iron sheets borrowed from the village, and beginning the hard work of clearing his land for planting.

In the last three months, he has planted 100 mounds of kumala, 39 mounds of yam (Philippine variety), 57 mounds of kawai, 70 mounds of traditional yams, 35 suckers of banana and 3,000 mounds of cassava. He spent \$100 to hire bullocks to plough part of his field. Most of the farming he did solely with help from his fellow villagers.

Today, Apolosi's achievement is the talk of his community with regular visits by members of his village.

Literally re-setting the button

of his life, Apolosi had to stare in the face of insurmountable odds. One being inaccessibility to basic amenities like water, whereby he has to walk 3kms to fetch it for his family and farm needs. There is also no electricity and he needs farm tools so he can expand his farm, which covers about five acres of mataqali land.

Apolosi is super excited about watching the growth of his crops and now realizes that as a farmer, setting goals is extremely important.

The Ministry of Agriculture assisted Apolosi with farm support seeds and has organized a tractor to work on his farm for a few hours at the subsidized rate of \$28 per hour. At the same time, Apolosi has

applied for the new program of 'Land Clearing' recently announced by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy for this new financial year of 2021-22.

Apolosi thanked the Ministry through its Agriculture Technical Officer, Ba for visiting him on his farm, something he had never dreamt would happen. Just like it had never occurred to him that he would one day take up full-time farming in order to not only look after his family but to ensure that his children would have a better future.

He said it was only through faith in God that has enabled him to see the fruits of his labour.

## IRRIGATION ASSISTANCE ACCELERATES PRODUCTION FOR TAVUA FARMER



Farmer Arvin Kumar at his farm in Yaladro, Tavua.

Growing and harvesting the assorted vegetables on his farm is now a faster exercise for Arvin Kumar.

This is thanks to the introduction of an irrigation kit on his farm, and for the 51-year-old Tavua farmer, it is a blessing for his farming household.

Mr. Kumar recently managed to harvest his tomatoes, watermelon, capsicum and cucumber from his 7-acre farm in Yaladro, Tavua.

Speaking through his son, Yogesh, 24, Arvin said he was assisted with a water tank, a water pump set, and irrigation pipes in January this year by the Ministry of Agriculture and Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

With 20 years of farming experience behind him, Arvin explained it was through farming that he was able to begin the slow progress of rebuilding his home following its destruction by TC Winston in 2016 and provide education for his four children, aged 26, 24, 20, and 17 years respectively.

He said that after every crop harvest, the family works to achieve their target for the new farming season.

Today, two of his sons now help him. One of them was the 2019 Coca Cola Games long-distance runner and Gold Medalist Yeshnil Karan who is earmarked to be in Brisbane from January next year to prepare for the Queensland Athletics season.



Newly harvested watermelon and tomatoes from Arvin's farm.

Helping out on the farm is a task that Arvin's children are accustomed to and one which they continue to do even after starting full-time employment.

Arvin supplies his produce to the Tavua, Ba and Lautoka markets.

He plants watermelon, capsicum, okra, pumpkin, bitter melon, eggplant, tomatoes and cucumber.



"Working on the farm can provide an income that will take care of your needs," said Mr. Kumar.

He thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and its development partners for providing the assistance of the irrigation kit and now hopes he would also have the service of a tractor to assist with land clearing.