



AGRITOURISM PROGRAMME LINKING HOTELS TO FARMING CLUSTERS ANNOUNCED



Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and senior management during the announcement of the inception of a new agritourism programme

As part of efforts to increase the engagement of communities with large tracts of idle land located close to hotels to actively involve themselves in agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture has announced the inception of a new agritourism programme.

The Our Community Agriculture (OCA) programme will set up hotels to their neighbouring communities and help these communities supply their produce to the hotels.

While making the announcement last week, Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment

Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said identifying opportunities to amplify linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors remained a key priority given the interdependence and employment opportunities both these sectors each offered.

"The Ministry wishes to engage communities with idle land, near hotels to engage in farming and supply their produce to the nearest hotel. In doing so, we will be able to utilise new land for agriculture and raise agricultural output.

"Additionally, we are encouraging hotels to utilize locally grown produce and by connecting our hotels to local communities, we contribute to their improved livelihood by transferring income in exchange for fresh farm produce," he said.

Minister Reddy said that the programme was being implemented as a means to boost the share of tourist spending retention in the local economy and to address the importation of produce by the tourism sector to meet the demand at the tourist table by strengthening linkages

between the hotel and farmers through agritourism initiatives.

The Ministry of Agriculture Agritourism Initiative OCA will focus on youth groups, women's groups, co-operatives and clusters of farmers in communities close to hotels and resorts.

"Each community group, consisting of at least 5 households, in a village or settlement, will be provided \$600.00 per acre for a maximum of 5 acres, (a total of \$3000), to clear, prepare and cultivate the land with vegetables or root crops with the intention to supply 100 per cent of their harvest to the nearest hotel," said Hon. Reddy.

"For phase 1, we are targeting a total of 30 farming groups. Noting \$3,000.00 per group, we have a total budget of \$90,000.00 for this program and for phase 1, we are limiting to one group per hotel," he added.

The disbursement of the selected farmers' groups will see 12 farmers' clusters from the Western Division, 8 from the Central Division, 6 farmers' clusters

from the Northern Division with 4 clusters from the Eastern Division being a part of the first phase of the OCA programme.

The OCA programme will include land clearing, land preparation, the provision of planting materials, cultivation, and farming equipment.

The Ministry will work closely together with the identified clusters of farmers, groups and co-operatives to supply fresh and value-added commodities to resorts and hotels.

Interested farming clusters must be located within 2 kilometres from their nearest hotel/resort and must provide evidence of ownership of up to 5 acres of land. Clusters must also have a minimum of 5 households and must be registered with the Ministry of Agriculture. Additionally, interested farming groups must also provide the support letter from their nearest hotel indicating proof of partnership with respective farming clusters.

BIODIVERSITY RESTORATION IMPERATIVE TO SUSTAIN LIVELIHOODS – MINISTER REDDY



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy handing over the R2R offer letter to Mr. Petero Watisoni of Natewa Village.

Restorative action is needed to maintain the health of our biodiversity for the benefit of our future generations.

This was relayed to villagers of Natewa Village, Natewa district and farmers of Naqai Village, Labasa in Vanua Levu who were recipients of fencing kits and planting material through the Ridge to Reef programme by the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and

Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during his most recent Northern Division tour.

"It is our responsibility to protect our biodiversity and build up its resilience, we cannot exist in isolation from our biodiversity but we need to exist in harmony with it and our biological resources, our flora and fauna.

"We need to get communities to add their contributions towards

protecting our biodiversity and contribute more towards biodiversity restoration. We're doing this not only for your interest but for the interests of our future generations too, as it is also of national interest," he said.

"And it is in this regard that we have chosen to provide support to your community here through the Ridge to Reef programme funded by the German Environmental Fund

so that our biodiversity can be protected and enhanced.

"As you know through this project, its primary objective is to protect our biodiversity by looking after our animals, and by isolating our animals so that they do not damage or destruct our efforts to restore the biodiversity around us and I want to thank the German government through its environmental fund, the administrators of the Ridge to Reef programme who have provided this funding," Minister Reddy added.

He said the funding would allow the recipients, who were raising livestock freely, to erect paddocks and keep their livestock within their paddocks in order for them to undertake restorative activities for the environment through the planting of more native tree species and the establishment of fruit trees orchards.

Meanwhile, 33-year-old Mr. James Allen who is an R2R fencing kit recipient living in Siberia, Labasa said receiving news of his inclusion into the R2R programme was a welcomed one as it was also the first time for him to receive Government assistance.

"I was happy because it felt like there was someone looking out for me, there is help out there with the Government and I was pleased and I was very happy to be a recipient of the R2R programme where I will receive planting materials and my fencing kit materials.

"Dealing with the environment, I am a farmer who never uses chemical fertilizers as I practice mulching and more organic traditional practices and manure, I

am a farmer who is very conscious of the environmental impacts of my farming practices and through the R2R programme, it has helped to engage me into this type of farming, which is the orchard and fruit tree planting," said Mr. Allen.

"I've always been a vegetable farmer and I also have a few livestock but through this programme, it has helped to be more aware of the environment and the importance of practising sustainable farming models," he added.

As for 63-year-old Brian Vunibola, the headman of Naqai Village, the R2R programme is one that has incorporated a positive development criterion for its recipient members.

"The Ridge to Reef programme is indeed a very well-thought-out project and it is important for all farmers to take up the model, it is a programme that encompasses a variety of models that will be beneficial to the farmer, the environment and our future generations," said Mr. Vunibola.

"There is a great concern for the wellbeing of our future generations and I am pleased to have been chosen as a recipient of the fencing kits and materials to help me become more environmentally aware for the restoration of our biodiversity, while not compromising the food and nutrition security of my family, I am very fortunate to be a part of the programme and am indebted to Government for such a wonderful programme.