



## VANUA BALAVU FARMERS HAPPY WITH FARM ACCESS ROAD WORKS



*A farm access road in Vanuabalavu that was done by the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways as part of its assistance to boost farmers in the maritime zone.*

Thirty-seven farmers in Vanua Balavu, Lau will now be able to expand their farms and increase their livelihoods after the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways ongoing farm road construction is fully completed.

A total of 2.5 kilometres is expected to be cleared creating new farm access as well as proper drainage.

The Ministry deployed machines to the island of Vanua Balavu last month in a bid to improve the farm access roads for farmers which has been long overdue.

Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Honourable Vatimi Rayalu says that there were requests from farmers in Lau for assistance on farm access roads.

"These farmers have not had the opportunity to expand their farms due to the difficulties they face in accessing prime farmland," Hon. Rayalu said.

"Through concerted efforts by the divisions in the ministry, we now have machines in Vanua Balavu Island. Works have begun on building farm access roads, and this

is a huge boost for the farmers."

"These farmers have been deprived of opportunities to explore potential crops for additional income. Works that are currently ongoing will certainly assist them in their quest for creating better livelihoods," explained Hon. Rayalu.

Hon. Rayalu said they had identified areas in Lakeba and Moala Islands after similar requests were made to him.

"Once Vanua Balavu is completed, we will then work closely with other government ministries and village representatives for the construction of farm access roads as well as additional land preparation works."

Principal Agriculture Officer for the Eastern Division, Nimilote Waqabaca said work was progressing well and farmers have also started their planting programmes.

"We also have a tractor that has been carrying our land preparation works and so far around six acres of land have been prepared and already planted with cassava for eight farmers from the villages of Malaka,

Urone, Boitaci and Narocivo."

According to 55-year-old Vuniwai Korocawiri, the village headman for Mualevu Village, families are excited with the progressive works.

"We are so happy and grateful to the government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways for the assistance. We have been crying for development for many years but it has always fallen on deaf ears. Before we used to reach our farms using horses and by foot," explained Mr. Korocawiri.

"We are confident that we will be able to plant more root crops and vegetables by expanding our farms. We thank Hon. Rayalu and his dedicated team," said Mr. Korocawiri.

The Ministry will continue to reach out to the isolated communities and islands in the Eastern Division to ensure sustainable agricultural development.

## MACUATA FARMER THRIVES USING SMART AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

Since industrialisation, conventional agricultural practices have put increasing pressure on land to produce more per hectare. Agrochemicals, monoculture cropping systems and intensive tillage have led to soil degradation which damages the landscape.

Climate smart agricultural practices can be part of the solution and help transform damaged landscapes into thriving ecosystems.

By adopting practices that promote soil health, biodiversity and ecosystem balance, smart agricultural practices seeks to create a harmonious relationship between agriculture and nature, leading to healthier soils, stable yields and a more resilient landscape.

In Nasalia Sub-division in Bocalevu, Macuata, 50-year old Yashwin Nair Kumar has been practicing smart agricultural practices and has been working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways to better manage his farm.

Before becoming a full time farmer, the father of two children worked as a taxi driver, school gardener and a truck driver for the Bauxite Mining Company in Bua and this is where he gained experience in operating a grader and a bulldozer.

He is an educated farmer who ensures to keep records of all activities carried out on the farm on a daily basis.

"I am happy to be farming and am

always working towards achieving my short to long-term objectives. I always follow the advice given by the technical officers of the Ministry as this will ensure sustainability of my crops in the long run," said Mr. Kumar.

The hardworking farmer obtained a loan from the Fiji Development Bank and purchased a van which he uses for transporting his produce to the Labasa Market on a weekly basis.

Through his dedication and best practices, Mr. Kumar was awarded the Best Slope Land Management Farmer at the National Agriculture Show 2023.

"I have been practicing an integrated approach with the advanced technology of agroforestry principles and this is planting yaqona and dalo in between selectively felled forest trees.

His hard work and perseverance was paid off when the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways assisted him with a Power Tiller and Irrigation Kit.

Mr. Kumar and his ever helping wife are two of the most prominent farmers in Wailevu district as they cultivate pineapple, assorted vegetables and root crops.

Last month, the organic team from the Koronivia Research Station installed a Bacterium Culture tank on his farm.

Bacterium Culture is made from Lactobacillus bacteria extracted from raw milk, obtained from the

Ministry's dairy farm, using rice wash water and then fed with molasses for bacteria to feed on during storage. The mixture can be stored for two or three months, after which its viability would start to decrease.

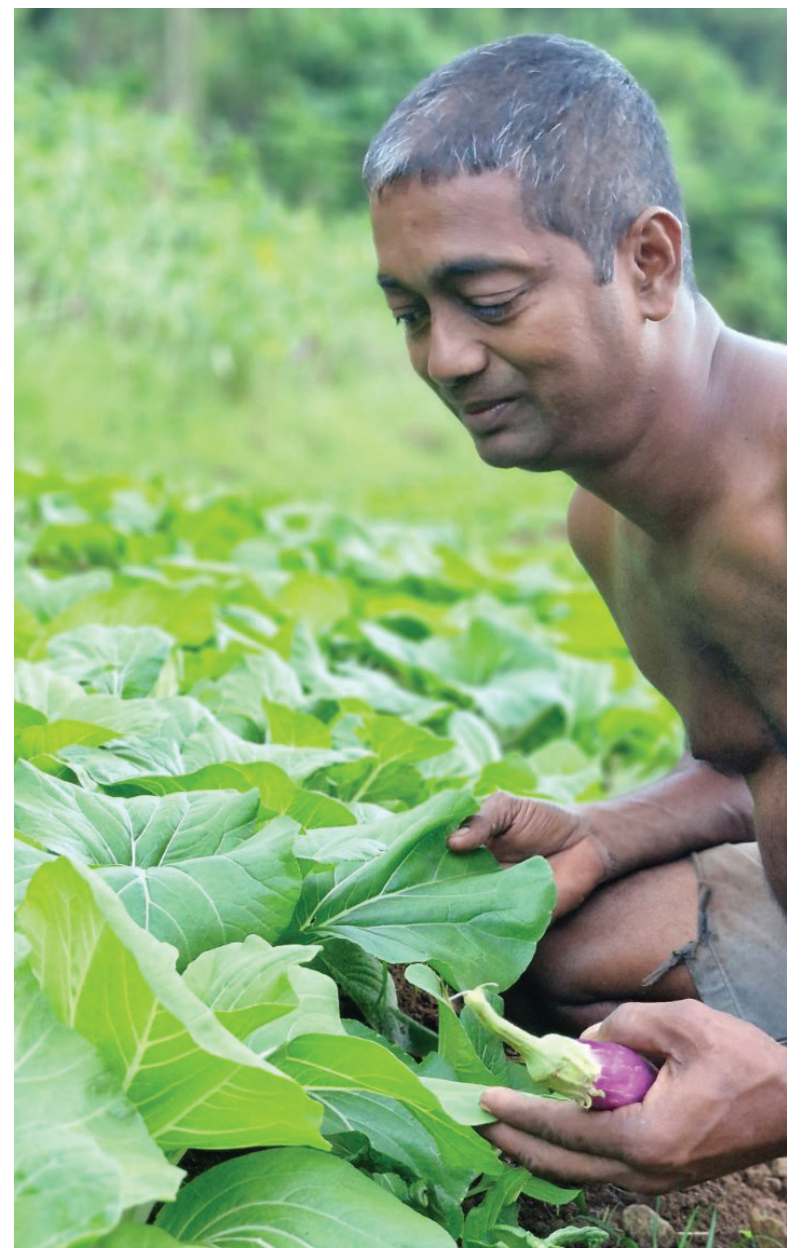
Director for Land Resources Planning Division, Amena Banuve says that the Ministry is looking to enrich soils of used and idle lands through application of organics because whatever chemical fertilizer that is being used now will contribute to unsustainable agricultural practices when abused.

"Farmers often want to hasten the process of weed control by mixing so many weedicides and this eventually kills micro-organisms in the soil," he said.

"What we are trying to do now is restore microorganisms to the soil and let them thrive and multiply and gradually reduce our consumption of chemical fertilizers and this is where the Bacterium Culture comes in to enhance microbial activity in the soil" added Mr. Banuve.

"Farmers can really see the difference in the quality of their crops where bacterium culture was applied and this will certainly help them in maximising their land and also in the restoration of soil nutrients."

The Ministry is encouraging farmers to start practicing smart agricultural practices to ensure sustainability of their farms for years to come.



*Mr. Kumar has seen significant changes in the growth of his vegetables and he thanks the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways for his supply of Bacterium Culture.*