

MINISTRY LAUNCHES NEW KUMALA VARIETY AND CASSAVA CHARACTERISTIC BOOKLET



L-R Deputy Secretary Agriculture Development - Dr Tekini Nakidakida, Minister for Agriculture and Waterways - Hon. Vatimi Rayalu and Director of Crop Research - Dr Shalendra Prasad during the launch of the new Kumala variety and Cassava Characteristic Booklet at Koronivia Research Station

Farmers, stakeholders and staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways converged at the Koronivia Research Station on Thursday this week to witness the launch of a new Kumala Variety and a Cassava Characteristic Booklet.

In launching the new variety called 'Vanuavatu', Minister for Agriculture and Waterways, Honourable Vatimi Rayalu said that today is a significant milestone which has been made possible through years of research.

"The release of the new variety of Kumala and the publication of the Cassava Characteristic Booklet

represents our unwavering commitment to enhancing agricultural productivity, ensuring food security, and improving the livelihoods and knowledge of our farmers," said Hon. Rayalu.

"Agriculture is more than an industry in Fiji; it is the heartbeat of our communities, the backbone of our economy, and the foundation of our sustenance. As we navigate challenges such as the negative impacts of climate change, soil degradation, and increasing agro-input costs, the necessity for innovative and resilient crop varieties becomes ever more pressing. Our

new crop variety is a testament to our proactive approach to mitigating these challenges," he added.

"The new variety name "Vanuavatu" has been thoughtfully chosen to embody the resilience, strength, and promise inherent in this new variety. It symbolizes our aspirations for a brighter and more prosperous future for our farmers and our communities."

The Vanuavatu variety is tolerant to drought and therefore can perform well under low rainfall conditions experienced by our farmers in parts of the Western and Northern Divisions. The variety also

has high iron content which is suitable to address malnutrition and anaemic conditions experienced by many people within our communities.

Hon. Rayalu extended his heartfelt gratitude to the officers at the Koronivia Research Station who played a role in researching and testing the new variety and ultimately launching it today.

"To the dedicated research staff, who have invested countless hours in the fields and laboratories, and to those farmers who graciously allowed us to establish demonstration and experimental blocks on their farms, I would like to thank you for your invaluable support and contributions," added Hon. Rayalu.

"My gratitude and appreciation to the research team behind the Cassava Characteristic Booklet. Your meticulous work in documenting the characteristics of the thirty-three (33) cassava varieties in our Research Plant Genetic Resource Fields across Fiji is commendable and crucial for the future of our agricultural research and practice."

The Ministry to date has released 12 varieties of Kumala making this the 13th. All these varieties have different characteristics such as colour, nutrient content, shapes, and growing conditions to name a few.

Kumala can be grown in diverse soil conditions and harvested within 3 to 4 months. It is recently been seen to

be used as flour and chips and sold in commercial outlets.

The "Cassava Characteristic Booklet" has been produced to assist farmers, students, extension officers, and the industry in correctly identifying the different cassava varieties.

Hon. Rayalu added that it will serve as a crucial information tool, empowering users to make informed decisions and safeguarding the future of cassava production.

"Researchers, too, will benefit greatly from this booklet in their future breeding activities."

Hon. Rayalu concluded by saying that the introduction of the new "Vanuavatu" kumala variety and the launch of the Cassava Characteristic booklet reflects our commitment to sustainability, environmental stewardship, and the advancement of agricultural knowledge in Fiji.

"These initiatives signify a significant step forward in our journey towards a more secure and prosperous agricultural sector."

Research on the Vanuavatu variety began in 2012 through vigorous trials and demonstrations. The Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways will continue to work towards enhancing agriculture research in a bid to grow a sustainable agriculture well into the future.



Vanuavatu variety

OFFICERS ENCOURAGED DURING TWO WEEKS REFRESHER TRAINING

Forty-two technical officers from the Central and Eastern Divisions recently completed two weeks of training which equipped them with knowledge on how to serve farmers better in the localities that they serve.

The training which ended on Friday 14th June, highlighted the importance of reviving farm management, enhancing knowledge on land use classification and capabilities, farming as a business and financial literacy.

The Ministry's Deputy Secretary for Agriculture Development, Dr Tekini Nakidakida urged officers to practice what they have learnt during the two weeks training.

"What you have learned in the past two weeks will assist you in your service in your respective localities and the execution of better farm plans for farmers," he said.

"As extension and livestock officers, you have to ensure that messaging and approach to farmers have to be right and always give solutions with the challenges that they face," said Dr. Nakidakida.

"You have to do your analysis from

your localities, identify the weaknesses, and also find the solutions. Be sure to know your farmers and visit them continuously for advice and monitoring purposes."

"Identify idle land in your localities, and put it into good use. We are working towards helping Fijians to thrive and grow, to earn money and make use of their land hence we must show them and lead the path to achieve that and increase the wealth of our nation from resources around us," he said.

Namena and Dawasamu Livestock locality officer in Tailevu, Samisoni Ledua Cama looks after two districts, 17 villages, and eight settlements.

He thanked the Ministry management team for giving him the opportunity to be part of the refresher course.

"The two weeks of training has been a huge boost where we are now better equipped with more information on the basic principles and approaches of Extension work."

"I believe most staff joining the Ministry have been doing what they have seen or what has been practiced



Deputy Secretary Agriculture Development - Dr. Tekini Nakidakida is flanked by Senior Officials and staff who were participants of the training

by senior staff. I must thank the organizers mainly the Land Resources and Planning Division for such a great learning opportunity," he said.

Agriculture Assistant (Crop) for Naitasiri, Anmol Maharaj said the training has given him ideas with

regards to drawing up farm plans for his farmers in Baulevu and Muaniweni with the aim of increasing their production level.

The in-house refresher training of 42 graduates are Crop and Livestock Officers from various Central and

Eastern Division stations.

The two weeks Training of Trainers training was executed earlier in the year to the crop and livestock officers of the Northern Division and will also be carried out in the Western Division next month.