

Emphasis on Agriculture Business Reiterated to Farmers and Youths



Minister with farmers in Nasealevu during his two days visit to North

Government's continued emphasis and stance on the promotion of farming as a business was reiterated to farmers and youths in the Northern Division.

This was relayed by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy

while responding to issues raised by farmers on Government's investment and assistance during his consultative visit to Vanua Levu earlier this week.

Hon. Reddy also encouraged young aspiring farmers to take full advantage of the available assistance and programs provided by the Government and to

consider agriculture as a career and business venture.

"Government wants to expand the agriculture sector, for this to happen, full-time farmers who are serious about their farming and will treat it as a business is needed.

"For this, you need to commit yourselves to become a full-time farmer. We will assist and support full-time farmers and we will ensure Governments investment is not wasted but is effectively utilized and its effect being realized on a long-term basis," said Minister Reddy.

Highlighting the potential contribution that young people could have on the sector, Hon. Reddy emphasized that in order for the agriculture sector's growth to eventuate, the involvement of youth at an early stage was critical as they would benefit from Government's investment in the initial stages of their farming venture.

"The Ministry encourages youths to take up agriculture and to seriously consider the sector as a business in order for young farmers to benefit from Government's current initiatives and programs to help secure them a better

future," he said.

"To attain this, the Ministry of Agriculture has introduced the 'Young Farmers Business Incubation Scheme' whereby the Ministry will engage 100 youths aged between 20-30 years for intensive hands-on training over a three-year incubation period, with a focus on youths with land readily available for

agricultural purposes and who are already engaged in farming," Minister Reddy added.

As part of the Young Farmers Business Incubation Scheme, these youths will be required to produce for local and export markets as they will be guided towards farming as a business.



Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy having discussions with farmers in Dreketilailai

Farmers Urged to Produce Specific Commodities for the Market

The need to specialize and produce specific commodities to meet market demands was reiterated to farmers in the Northern Division.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy who reiterated that Government would soon commence linking farmers directly to specific markets, provided farmers specialized in the production of the commodity in demand.

"Farmers who are fully dependent on Government is now no longer being entertained, we don't want dependent farmers. However, we want to provide you with the market, whereby your produce is bought from the farm gate.

"For this, the Ministry will identify and will advise farmers on what particular crop they should produce, and this

recommended crop will be planted all year round whereby farmers will not have to worry about their market as we will link them directly to the market," he said.

"A farmers' biggest fear is finding the market, but now we will take away that fear from the farmers but for that to happen, the farmer should also play their role and continue to supply the exporter with the crops that we recommend," he added.

Minister Reddy further elaborated that the recommended crops the Ministry of Agriculture would be recommending were exportable ones and could be stored for extended periods of time while still maintaining its quality, one of which was Pulses, which was earmarked for the North.

"This new initiative will guide the growth of the agriculture sector as it is anticipated that through it, exports will

increase, contributing to the country's economy and GDP," he said.

"To initiate this, we soon will be sending one commodity officer to the Northern Division who will conduct the survey and identify farmers, as well as what crops they will be advised to produce," added Hon. Reddy.

As part of the initiative, farmers would sign contract agreements with exporters to ensure a continuous supply of recommended produce along with the agreed pricing of respective commodities, which would be revised annually.

In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture would provide basic land preparation for the startup on the one-third and two-thirds basis, with farmers expected to produce their own seeds after the initial set-up and assistance was provided by the Ministry on their respective farms.



Minister Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy with farmers of Korotari

Northern Division set to become Hub of Local Livestock Industry



Minister speaking to farmers in Laqere Tabia

The livestock industry in the Northern Division is earmarked to become the hub for the sector in the country.

This was shared by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during an informal talanoa session with the farmers of Laqere, Tabia in Labasa.

"The Ministry of Agriculture will continue to stimulate the growth of the livestock sector and will promote for

increased beef, sheep and goat farming in Vanua Levu, for that we will give farmers the start-up material for fencing and paddock.

"After the first start-up assistance, we want you to expand on your own through investment from your farm," he said.

"We want Vanua Levu to be the hub of livestock production in Fiji. We will establish abattoir's from Bua to Wainikoro, soon after we see that production is increasing and farmers have shown interest in livestock farming," he added.

Hon. Reddy assured farmers would be linked directly to the markets as they would no longer have to worry about the markets and transportation as it would be picked from their farm gate adding that though prices may fluctuate, it would be reviewed annually.

He elaborated that the project would commence later in the year or early next year at the latest, stating that plans

were already in place by the Ministry of Agriculture to implement the program.

Meanwhile Dr. Reddy has also cautioned farmers who slaughtered and sold meat without certification and following the proper process.

"All the livestock meat that is sold in the market should be certified and should go through abattoirs. It is illegal to slaughter an animal, even for family or home consumption which is not certified or does not go through an abattoir," he said.

"For meats which are sold in shops, this will be confiscated by the meat inspector if it does not go through an abattoir and has no proper certification as Government does not want to put any one's health at risk by consuming meat which does not go through a proper slaughterhouse," said Minister Reddy.



F1 Sheep Breed