

## Minister Reddy Recommends Organic Farming

Practicing organic farming for improved quality healthy produce and environment safety has been recommended as the most viable option for farmers.

This was highlighted by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during his recent visit to Praneel Kumar's organic farm in Kulukulu, Sigatoka.

"Government supports the practice of sustainable methods of cultivation, we're promoting the minimal use of chemicals and fertilizers and urging farmers to revert and practice organic farming.

"There is a niche market for organic produce and the Ministry of Agriculture will continue to advocate new strategies that minimize the use of chemicals and fertilizers on farms as current practices have taken a toll on the land and environment," he said.

Minister Reddy also stressed that fostering a subsidy based system for agriculture would not be beneficial for the sector, stating that reducing the use of fertilizers and shifting towards organic farming and use of organic fertilizers was the more suitable choice.

"Organic farming will protect our global brand image which is an environmentally friendly product that will generate revenue and allow entry into high-end value markets," he said.

Work is already in progress on the strategies to implement organic production by the Ministry of Agriculture.

"There are two things we are embarking on. Firstly, in most parts of Fiji and highlands of Viti Levu, farmers still practice organic farming as a way of life. In order to certify these farmers, the Ministry is working closely with our local counterparts, POETCom (Pacific

Organic and Ethical Trade Community), the "Earth Care Agency" (TECA), and a global certification body - "Control Union Certifications" (CUC) - to carry out inspections and issue certificates to organic farmers. We have identified 30 organic ginger farmers to pilot the organic farm project in the Districts of Nasau and Nailuva in Ra," said Minister Reddy.

Praneel Kumar, a 31-year-old organic farmer specializes in herbs, fruits and vegetables planting on a total land area of 10 acres. He is currently supplying to local and international hotels and restaurants around Sigatoka, Nadi and Suva.

Mr Kumar was assisted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2017 with the protective structure and farm implements worth \$16,000, with profits from this assistance already reinvested back into his farm for further expansion.



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and senior officials from Ministry of Agriculture with Praneel Kumar (in green)

Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy has reiterated Government's support towards Tilivalevu's Beef Scheme.

During an informal talanoa session with beef farmers of Tilivalevu Village in Nadroga recently, Minister Reddy said with Government's continued development programs, the onus was on them to expand and increase production.

"Developing the local livestock industry remains a key priority of the Ministry, especially beef, as Government continues in our efforts to reduce imports and produce locally for our own consumption as well as for the export markets.

"The livestock sector plays an important role as it contributes largely towards Fiji's economy, and if you as farmers do your part and are serious in increasing production at the farm level, the agriculture sector will surely play an even more important role in Fiji's economy in the coming years," he added.

Hon. Reddy also assured farmers that

they would be compensated accordingly for animals found to have Tuberculosis (TB) and Brucellosis.

"Livestock disease compensation is paid to farmers for the culling of animals for diseases that the authorities identify under relevant legislation. These diseases are usually those that cause economic losses, risks to human health due to diseases being zoonotic (diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans and vice-versa) or diseases that can affect international trade markets.

The compensation is paid for the value of the culled animals, to help farmers in their rehabilitation or recovery efforts, and to encourage farmers to collaborate with the relevant authorities in their disease reporting, and disease eradication and control programmes.

In addition, Hon. Reddy also encouraged farmers to consider producing crops on a large scale to supplement their livestock earnings; "You can diversify and plant market-oriented produce whereby you will decide on five to six crops and we will help you to start with that. The

Ministry will link you directly to the market where the crops will be picked directly from the farm," he said.

Assistance such as the upgrading of farm roads, irrigation systems and provision of clean water sources was relayed to the villagers during the talanoa session.

Meanwhile, there are currently 26 farmers who are utilising the Tilivalevu Beef Scheme project on a total land area of 2375.31 hectares with a total of 708 stock and 251 cows. The group also has 25 goat farmers with a total stock of 162. The cluster group currently supplies their beef and goat to local markets.



Minister Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and senior staff of the Ministry with Tilivalevu farmers in Sigatoka

## Local Exporter Receives Storage Facility



Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and Exporter Mr. Dharmen Kumar while opening the cooler

The Ministry of Agriculture's Export Promotion Program aims to encourage a consistent supply of high quality agricultural produce for export markets.

This was highlighted by the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while officially handing over a cooler storage facility for DKAY exports at Mr. Dharmen Kumar's residence at Naceva Settlement in Sigatoka last week.

"Agriculture products are perishable in nature, this particular exporter collects the produce from this area, and there are instances when the product is not sent directly to the market, and there is a need to store the produce and then organise a market.

"It is very important that we have the storage facility, particularly when there

is a large amount of agricultural produce being supplied. We don't want farmers to be told that their produce will not be bought due to an influx in market supply as it will dishearten farmers," he said.

"When there is a cool storage facility, that particular problem will be solved, the produce can be stored until the market is available," added Hon. Reddy.

Storage facilities are an important component of the value chain in terms of organizing the market; "Government is looking at the transportation of produce from the farm gate to the storage facility or to the market, and under the Export Promotion Program there will be more opportunities for farmers and exporters, whereby they will be assisted once and will be encouraged to reinvest on their own from then on," said Hon. Reddy.

Other programs existed within the Ministry to support exporters boost supplies for the export market.

"The Ministry's Agro-Processors Infrastructure Support Program (APIS) budgeted at FJ\$1 million, aims to achieve economic growth by encouraging

consistent supply, improving existing export pathways and creating new export opportunities," said Minister Reddy.

"The program focuses on helping exporters meet standards and requirements of importing countries and businesses. It includes the establishment of collection centers, cold storage systems, and the improvement of current processing and exporting facilities to meet international market requirements," he added.

Dharmen Kumar was thankful for the Ministry's assistance towards his export business, with the storage facility worth \$40,666.67 to contribute significantly to his consistent supply to his New Zealand market, which he supplies twice a week from produce on his own farm and that of 20 other farmers from within their settlement.

"I started on a small scale as it was difficult for me to store the produce because there was no proper storage facility as most of the agricultural produce needed to be properly stored to maintain its quality for the export market," said Mr. Kumar.

"This cooler will help me to store vegetables in bulk and continue to buy from the farmers even when there is an influx in supply from local farmers.

"The cooler will help me to increase my supply for the export market which will also encourage other farmers to be consistent in supplying vegetables as they will not have to worry about the market for their production," he said.

## Farmers Assured of Government Assistance



Minister Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy and senior staff of the Ministry with farmers of Maro Settlement

The Ministry of Agriculture will assist farmers wanting to commercialize and develop their small holder agricultural farming activity.

This was highlighted by Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy while addressing sugarcane and crop farmers at Maro Settlement in Sigatoka last week.

"We're actively promoting commercial agriculture to farmers who are interested in diversifying to take agricultural farming as a business; if you're thinking about the market for your produce, let me reassure

you that you now don't have to worry about that because we're now linking farmers directly to the market," he said.

Minister Reddy highlighted existing grants and subsidies which were available and also noted the Agriculture Ministry's role in providing relevant assistance for farmers.

"Be mindful that you should play your part, the Ministry

will assist farmers only once as you're expected to expand on your own after the first assistance has been provided," he reiterated.

"We can't continuously pour in government resources and money to support leisurely farming, instead, we want to support farmers realize their potential because there is national interest for the growth of the sector to contribute more effectively to our economy.

Minister Reddy is currently on a two-day tour of Sigatoka, meeting and holding consultations with farmers and agro-exporters.

