

## Etuate's Kava Journey



*Etuate Buakula at his farm*

Dedicating half a century of one's life to a single purpose – to fend for the livelihood of his loved ones, has motivated Etuate Buakula to succeed in kava farming.

The 70-year-old of Nasau Village, Nabukelevu in Kadavu began plying his trade as a young farmer 50 years ago as a young man of just 20, setting his sights on offering the best for his nine siblings through cultivating the land and concentrating his efforts solely on yaqona.

As he recalls, life as a young man was as sweet as honey as the sway of friendship, lounging about with his cousins, going out fishing, and enjoying life's daily pleasures was a joy back then but he never

strayed too far from his ultimate goal.

All the while, Etuate continued planting yaqona, something he took considerable pleasure in doing as he witnessed the fluctuations and subsequent rise of the kava industry during this time.

"I grew up learning farm work from my father and family, the tactics of yaqona farming was from the daily visit to the family farm.

"I then started planting my own yaqona for my own until old age caught up with my parents and with the farming knowledge already instilled in me, I shouldered the welfare of my other siblings," said the pragmatic Etuate.

This responsibility matured him as he had the daunting task of putting his younger siblings through the best education he could offer, as words his own father told him echoed through all that he set out to do.

"My father served alongside the New Zealand and American army and one thing he learnt was the negative impacts of a poor education; he sent a message to us through our aunt who was with us at that time for us to take education seriously as times were changing."

From the outset, this upbringing challenged and molded him and shortly after completing secondary school, Etuate se-

cured work in the hustle and bustle of the city before his parents called for his return to the island.

"It was like I never left Nasau, I blended in well again with my peers and while having my own separate farm, I took over the maintenance of our family farm," he said.

"Our main source of income was yaqona and with the shared experiences of my father, I made a promise to fulfill his request and dedicated myself to farming for the education of my nine siblings, who all went on to study in universities and graduate with their degrees, all their tuition was paid from yaqona," Etuate shared.

"The price of yaqona then was 2s (shillings), an equivalent of 10 cents, and it actually covered the cost of living, from 2s it moved up to \$1.00 then to \$10 per kilogram in 1990," he beamed.

Mr. Buakula's path was as straight as can be, to toil for his siblings at the behest of their father which he did not falter in the slightest until he had kept his promise.

After seeing off all of his family members educational needs and nudging them towards paths of their own and greener pastures, Etuate settled down to have a family of his own.

"I got married in 1980, with satisfaction knowing had I gotten married earlier, my siblings wouldn't have a better education and I would break my father's heart, so I made sure to plant yaqona, see them excel before settling down.

With 5 children of his own to look after now, Mr. Buakula stuck to his forte and continued with the cultivation of yaqona.

"Another shouldered responsibility came when I had my own family and with my children having to go to school again, the obligation to look after them was nothing new as I had mastered putting my siblings through their education from yaqona, the same would be done for my children too," he said.

His target is to plant 2,000-3,000 yaqona plants every year to cater for obligations to the Church, vanua and his family's welfare but yaqona farming was not always a bed of roses for Etuate, though he earned a

respectable income from it.

"I also faced challenges along the way in terms of limited knowledge of introduced yaqona problems and having the unforeseen needs of school fees and other requirements before the maturity of my crops," he said.

"Experiencing that, I mapped out a plan to address these issues; I started practicing phase planting and that accommodated unforeseen circumstances, but the rule was, it would only be uprooted when these situations arose, my yaqona would not be uprooted unnecessarily, only for its intended purpose," he relayed with a smile.

In addition, it hasn't all been smooth sailing for the adamant yaqona farmer, natural disasters have also wreaked havoc on his farming exploits, the extended drought of 2015 and the devastating cyclones of 2016 took a toll on his production during those subsequent years.

Despite all this, he remained committed to meeting his targeted number of yaqona planting and has benefitted greatly from the sudden local price hike of yaqona.

"The idea to replant yaqona came before the sudden increase in yaqona prices and I was fortunate to have my yaqona plants replanted as income generated from my current yaqona sales had skyrocketed.

Sharing his thoughts on what it takes to lead a successful farming career, Etuate said, "It comes with the passion you have, when you put all your heart and mind into what you do, you will be amazed at what you can achieve.

"I achieved all this from farming yaqona and I urge young farmers to manage their farms wisely, for unemployed youths, make use of the land and go make a living for yourselves, if I could do it from a young age, so can you," he encouraged.

There is little he has left to achieve, he has built the foundations for his household to flourish.

This is a man who has lived a life revolving around the kava industry on the island of Kadavu, one who kept his word to his father and has continued to prosper on the roots of Piper methysticum.

## Major Boost for Highland Farmers



*Minister for Agriculture Dr. Mahendra Reddy with Senior Officers and Farmers in Nadarivatu*

The Ministry of Agriculture has significantly improved the livelihoods of Nadarivatu farmers by securing markets for their Red Pontiac potato variety and introducing a new Farmers Trust Scheme.

Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr Mahendra Reddy while officially launching the Farmers Trust Scheme as part of the "Reinvestment Concept in the Fijian Agricultural Sector" in Navai,

Nadarivatu recently confirmed that nearly 7,000 kilograms of the new potato variety had been harvested within the Nadarivatu plateau and would be purchased by the Agricultural Marketing Authority (AMA) at a guaranteed price of \$1.50 per kilogram.

As part of the Farmers Trust Scheme, the AMA will buy produce from the farmer, paying only 85 percent of the total proceeds from the sales, with the remaining 15 percent placed in a trust account maintained by the Agricultural Marketing Authority.

"These are models of farmers for remote interiors and we are encouraging exporters to also open trust accounts for farmers that supply them, as long as we see that deducted percentages are going back to the farmers," said Minister Reddy.

"It is a tripartite arrangement between the farmer, AMA and the Ministry of Agriculture. The role of the Ministry is an overseer and we will verify and advise on the package of practice for reinvestment.

"Out of the 21 potato farmers that marketed their produce to AMA, 10 of them are now pioneers of the 'Reinvestment Concept'. With the realization of this concept, I see a paradigm shift creating a mindset of a new generation of farmers who will unleash the full potential of Fijian agriculture away from the old culture of over-dependency," added Minister Reddy.

The initiative also allows farmers to

increase their reinvestment contribution upon agreement with the AMA, with the farmer able to access their 15 percent (their contribution) anytime for the purpose of reinvesting in the farm.

Executive Chairman for AMA Setareki Tale also elaborated that the 15 percent deducted from crop sales by farmers will go towards their own preparations for the new planting seasons, and was not exclusively to potato farming, with farmers having the option to choose which crops their deducted funds are to be utilized on, regardless of commodity.

The reinvestment fund can be used for land preparations, procurement of agro-inputs and procurement of fixed assets for farm operations. The reinvestment fund will not be paid directly to the farmer but to the vendor of the outlined activities.

The AMA will maintain individual accounts of each farmer with account details being readily accessible at any point in time to farmers who sign up to be members of the scheme.

For 62-year-old retiree, and Farmer Trust pioneer, Penisoni Nabitu of Nadala Village the reinvestment concept was a welcome one; "This is a great initiative that is being introduced by Government because on a lot of occasions, after harvesting, there is little to no planting material left for farmers to plant for the new season as well as the agro-input

needed to fertilize farms.

"I believe this initiative will ensure that we have reserved funds to cater for our needs and can access it whenever needed, we can liaise with the Ministry through this Trust account to receive further assistance, this scheme will surely benefit us in the long term," said Mr. Nabitu.

Echoing similar sentiments was Apenisa Vunitale, a farmer of Nadala who acknowledged the Government for continuously assisting farmers to improve their livelihoods sustainably.

"With the news that the market will be brought right to our villages and other Government programs that will contribute to our successful harvesting and marketing of potatoes and other produce, we couldn't be more thankful. This is a great relief for all farmers in this district," he said.

"The thought and effort put into introducing this initiative cannot have come at a better time because, first it has ensured that we have a secure market, and second, it will ensure that we save some of our money during this season and it can be used again during the next season, this is a blessing for every farmer who signs up for the trust account because, after every harvesting season, we will always have money reserved for the coming season and so on.



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