

Rahul: Young, Successful and Growing



Rahul in his potted yaqona nursery

To be young and prospering, when all the while still developing is oft not found in local agricultural settings.

Yet for 28-year-old Rahul Kumar of Qila, Taveuni, that norm is non-existent as he continues to pave a farming legacy for himself on their family farm.

Rahul has never once regretted the de-

cision he made to become a farmer after leaving Bucalevu Secondary School in Taveuni in 2009.

Once a pure science student with good grades, he often thought to take up medicine but financial constraints kept him from pursuing medicine.

"I didn't want to apply for a scholar-

ship which I was positive I could have secured, I felt I had to respect my parents decision to return to the family farm and make a living out of it and I have not regretted taking up the responsibilities of the farm.

Although Rahul was brought up on their farm in Qila, he still had a lot to learn and through guidance from his grandfather Permal Naidu and his father, he has turned into a successful young farmer.

"My parents were growing old, weak and had become sickly and the farm production was declining, we couldn't leave the land idle.

"I gained most of my farming skills from my grandfather who was also a farmer and now I have allowed them to rest while I take over from them and do something for them, they have inspired me," said Rahul.

He picked up from where he left off during his formative years when he planted 3,000 yaqona plants to assist payment of his tuitions.

"Starting was hard but once I got a hang of it, everything just seemed to fall into place and ideas just kept coming up; while farming over the years, for me, it was more a trial and error type of planting, I experimented, I made mistakes but I kept on going," he smiled.

"When I started, I had to ask around for

yaqona and dalo planting materials from my friends around the area to start with," he shared.

Fast forward to the present and the 25-acres family land is a treasure trove of greenery, filled with dalo, yaqona and assorted vegetables.

Being the modern farmer that he is, Rahul gradually moved from traditional farming systems to a more modernized farming system of mechanization, with irrigation systems set up on his farm.

"Our farm is on the dry side of the area and I had to think of something to assist in the irrigation, if not my production would be affected and that was when the dam came in handy to irrigate my crops during dry seasons.

"Again, it was an experiment for me when I started my irrigation sprinklers, the joinery, the dam and ideas kept coming and I kept moving, I failed on the second attempt to extend the sprinklers and although I was at a loss I kept trying until it was perfectly set up," he said.

Mr. Kumar was also assisted through the Export Promotion Program of the Ministry of Agriculture, whereby he continued developing his dalo and yaqona increasing his production volumes.

With a total of 12,000 dalo plants on the ground and an increase in yaqona planting from 1.5 hectares to 3 hectares,

the Qila farmer hopes to keep increasing his yields through utilization of his irrigation system in order to meet the demands of the local and export markets.

"Before I was assisted, I challenged myself to keep moving whether or not I received anything from the Ministry or not but I am fortunate that I was assisted which also contributed to my production."

Through it all, what once was a childhood task for Rahul has turned into his livelihood and with him utilizing his acquired knowledge, Rahul has mechanized his farm and has also set up a nursery for potted yaqona.

Rahul shared his philosophy and message for one to succeed in farming as having the strength of character to do what needs to be done, no matter how unorthodox.

"If you are willing to do something, just do it, educate yourself and think outside the box, don't be afraid to experiment, be independent and keep moving and you will achieve great things.

"Life is all about learning from the mistakes you make and building yourselves from what you have failed in," he said.

No doubt, with this positive mentality, Rahul has all that he needs to succeed as a farmer and continuously grow from strength to strength.

Lomaiviti Kava Farmers Empowered



Lomaiviti farmers during the Kava training

A collaborative initiative to empower local Kava farmers was recently held in Levuka Town for farmers in the province of Lomaiviti.

The kava empowerment training workshop was a collaborative initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture, the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural

Market Access (PHAMA Plus) Program, Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF), the University of the South Pacific (USP) and Kava Exporters to inform Lomaiviti kava farmers of the current status of the kava industry and the way forward in terms of domestic and export pathways.

Ministry of Agriculture Principal

Agriculture Officer Policy and Budget Sowane Remudu when addressing farmers reminded them of their role in the development of the economy, and also highlighting the importance of their contribution to the agriculture sector.

"Kava is an important agricultural commodity for Fiji for a range of cultural, social and economic reasons and the impact of your commitment everyday has enabled business people to export your produce, and has also in turn created jobs to contribute to our economic development.

"Holistically, you contribute to food and income security, rural development, poverty alleviation, empowerment of our youths and women, and most importantly to the accomplishment of our social obligation to the vanua, church and the economy," said Mr. Remudu.

He highlighted the benefit of the kava training to farmers as it would broaden their knowledge on various aspects of the Kava industry unbeknownst to them in order to measure solutions to current issues faced within industry.

"Most importantly, the training will highlight constraints in the protection of kava from diseases, improved soil use,

capacity building, enhancing market pathways and ground production," he said.

"This is also an opportune time to share information with other kava farmers, encourage individuals on the importance of kava farming, collate information and make appropriate and suitable action plans concerning issues affecting our exporters."

The sessions also offered farmers an opportunity to meet with members of the Kava (Yaqona) Task Force committee, which included experts on different areas of the kava value chain.

"The Kava (Yaqona) Task Force Committee members are the ones driving the Yaqona industry forward and what will be discussed are researched areas of the industry that was relevant in boosting the production of the commodity," he said.

"Yaqona is the second highest commodity contributing to the Gross Domestic Production of the country and it is the aim of the Yaqona taskforce to return yaqona production to yields previously experienced before and this training will pave the way forward," Mr. Sowane said.

Meanwhile, Sawaieke villager and yaqona farmer, Timoci Waqa thanked the Kava Task Force committee for the

initiative and for reaching out to kava farmers in the maritime region.

"As a farmer there are some areas that needs addressing and I have often relied on traditional methods or solutions from other farmers and this meeting has enabled me to look at things from a new angle, learn new things and the latest researched solutions," said Mr. Waqa.

"I will surely educate my fellow farmers on what they need to do on their farms," he added.

Saint John's College Agriculture teacher Taina Saukuru acknowledged the training saying: "As a female teacher interested in agriculture, this is a good way to instill and educate students of the potential farming can bring as a career."

Kava, the top agricultural export commodity in 2018, earned around \$30million with dalo exports in second, earning the country \$23million in foreign exchange.

85 yaqona farmers from within the province attended the empowerment workshop, the 3rd in a series following recently concluded workshops for farmers of Cakaudrove and Kadavu provinces.

SELECTED AREAS COVERED FOR THE 2020 FIJI AGRICULTURE CENSUS PILOT EXERCISE



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