

Farmers Urged to Utilize Arable Land



Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy discussing with farmers during his visit to Ovalau Island.

The use of underutilized arable land for agriculture was reiterated to farmers on Ovalau, as available resources on the island were conducive for large scale farming.

This was stressed by Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy during his recent visit to the island whereby he highlighted production figures on the island could increase if farmers' fully utilized their resources and implemented sound farming practices.

Currently, 30% of farmers on the island planted dalo and 20% planted yaqona, which Minister Reddy highlighted needed expansion into other agricultural produce; "The island of Ovalau is suitable for farming, utilize the land, even the land that you think isn't suitable for farming is actually arable, you will have to work on it, clear the land and start planting.

"The common perception of growing to sustain your consumption on a subsistence basis needs to be re-evaluated, you're only fulfilling your requirements and the surplus production is being sold to meet expenses," he said.

"Though this is sufficient for your daily needs, we want you to keep growing, there is a huge potential in these arable lands which when managed properly and provided with the necessary input such as a steady source of water, can be exploited to boost agricultural production," added Minister Reddy.

The Ministry's continuing efforts in providing technical support and advice to

farmers to develop their farms and expand the sector in the country was also highlighted to farmers.

"We are here to support you and we want you to treat farming as a business, when you start your business we will assist but after that, you grow on your own. You have to partner with us in order to receive the best available support, to motivate you and offer the Ministry's resources but then if you do not participate then we can't do much."

Hon. Reddy also received feedback from farmers on the Ministry's services and added that the Ministry was working towards an inclusive growth strategy while also urging farmers to liaise more closely with Ministry officials.

"I understand there have been some issues regarding services and I want to hear what the issues encountered were but I also acknowledge that staff have done extremely well under difficult circumstances but we need to take it to another level and do things differently to achieve this inclusive growth strategy."

"We want you to grow and we will grow together, we don't want people to be left out just because they are out of sight; though you're out of sight, you will never be out of mind because Government takes into account the needs of all Fijian citizens when developing policies, regardless of geographical location," he said.

Farmers were also reminded of their important role as rural and maritime contributors to the agriculture sector.

Wainiveli Farmer Receives Yaqona Drying Shed



Mr. Viliame Volau of Wainiveli Settlement

The challenges of storing and drying yaqona during unfavourable weather will now be a thing of the past for yaqona farmer Viliame Volau of Wainiveli Settlement in Lovoni District, Ovalau.

This follows the recent commissioning of a newly constructed yaqona drying and storage shed for Mr. Viliame Volau who now no longer has to worry about the drying of his yaqona and its safe storage.

The assistance, under the Rural and Outer Islands (ROI) Program of the Ministry of Agriculture, was awarded to the farmer to boost yaqona production in the district.

Mr. Volau said the assistance would enable him to increase his production as compared to previous years; "Over the years, I faced difficulties in drying my

yaqona, especially during rainy weather and that was when I decided to approach the Ministry of Agriculture for assistance.

"I am grateful to the Ministry because through this intervention I am positive that it will improve my production. It will decrease my labour cost and increase my production and revenue, previously I could earn around \$3,000 but now I know my income will increase," he said.

"The income I earned from the sale of yaqona has enabled me to construct my home and assisted me to pay for my relatives' children education," added Mr. Volau.

While commissioning the new shed, Minister for Agriculture Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy said the assistance was part of the Ministry's service delivery to improve

farmers' livelihoods.

"We are proud to assist enthusiastic and hardworking farmers like you and we want to see you grow by yourself from this assistance, expand your production and build more driers with the intention to venture into commercial agriculture," said Minister Reddy.

"Make use of the available resources you have and increase your production, there are markets available and meeting its demand is crucial. Now that you have received this assistance, you must continue to expand your planting and business to the next level," added Hon. Reddy.

The yaqona drying and storage shed, under the Rural and Outer Islands development program was worth \$9,630.00.

Ovalau Farmers Laud Minister's Visit



Minister visiting Mr Douglas's piggery farm

Farmers of Ovalau in Lomaiviti expressed their gratitude to the Minister for Agriculture Mahendra Reddy during his recent visit to farmers on the island.

Aisake Bukavesi of Lovoni Village said the visit enabled them to share their experiences as farmers; "We are grateful for the visit by the Minister for Agriculture, we have been farming for years and this visit has encouraged us to increase our production as there are incentives for farmers to rise to another level," he said.

"Through this tour, we as farmers know that we are not forgotten as a maritime region, it restores in us the belief that we have the potential to contribute to the country's economy but we need directions to assist us to develop further," said Mr. Bukavesi.

"We can produce and exceed other productive areas in Fiji but we need

guidance from the Ministry to set out development pathways and through this visit, we know there will be some positive outcomes," added Mr. Bukavesi.

Minister for Agriculture, Hon. Dr. Mahendra Reddy reiterated Government's commitment to assist farmers address the issues which affected productivity.

"There is a lot of potential on this island and there is an opportunity to progress from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, and the Ministry stands to assist all farmers," said Hon. Reddy.

Farmers raised issues such as inaccessibility to farms and construction of farm roads, market access and drainage while also querying about other available Ministry assistance.

"The market is available and the Agro Marketing Authority of Fiji is available to

assist with the buying of your production from your farm gate," said Minister Reddy.

"Although there have been challenges faced between buyers and farmers, I want to reassure you, this is the dawn of a new era and things will work out differently, collaborate with our Agricultural Officers for assistance available within the Ministry to elevate your farming standards, we will assist you," he added.

Farmers were also advised to form farming clusters as it would be mutually beneficial to individual farmers in receiving assistance as well as for the Ministry of Agriculture to serve farmers more comprehensively.