

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment

Can the Minister inform Parliament what are some of the technical and financial assistance given to our rural farmers that cultivate on unleased communal (*Mataqali*) lands.

Honourable Speaker, I rise to brief the honourable Members of Parliament on the technical and financial assistance currently administered by the Ministry of Agriculture for our rural farmers in Fiji that farm on unleased communal lands (*Mataqali*).

From the outset, allow me to clarify that for any farmer requesting assistance from the Ministry, especially those who occupy communal unleased land should produce a letter of consent from landowners. Once the consent letter is provided the farmer is included as part of our normal programme. During the 2009 Agriculture Census a total of 42,458 farms [65%] were recorded as unleased communal land. This identifies the large number of farmers that are still farming at subsistence level.

Honourable Speaker, the budget allocation from 2016/17, 2017/18-2018/19 for MOA increased by 67% which indicates the intent and commitment of Government towards agriculture development and its contribution to economic growth of the country.

Honourable Speaker, the general increase in the budget allocations in the past 3 consecutive fiscal years also shows a continuous increase in the number of rural communities and individuals being assisted. According to the survey conducted by the Ministry in 2018 on the Review of Farming Household Listing, it confirmed that the total number of farming household has increased to 71,173. This is 9% more than the farmers covered in the 2009 Agriculture Census which reflected the increased activities and collaboration between agriculture officials, farmers and the private sector.

Honourable Speaker, Government identifies the urgent need to broaden our services in the Ministry in order to address the need and concern of the rural based farming communities in Fiji. For this reason, the Ministry is currently reviewing the

current organization structure as one of our key activities in this financial year. This includes decentralization of authority to Geographical Regional Managers which will ensure effective and efficient service delivery to our rural farmers and stakeholders. The new structure will improve MoA's visibility and coverage on the ground. This is vital to increase the number of extension officer to farmer's ratio. The current ratio is estimated at an average of 1:1000. There are 356 Extension Officers currently serving in the 57 stations nationwide.

Honourable Speaker, the Ministry continues to support all farmers in Fiji at all levels in the rural & outer islands, interior and peri-urban through number of Agriculture Programmes. The Crop Extension Division and services Program account to a major part of the Ministry's budget that directly support our rural farmers. A total of \$38.5 million was allocated in this year's budget, through the 60 capital programmes for our crop & livestock farmers. A total of 85% of these programs directly assist rural farmers who farm at their own Mataqali land for food security and also for commercial undertakings. Please allow me to speak on few programmes and the impact it has created to the rural community.

Agriculture Extension Services

Honorable Speaker, The Agriculture Extension Services mainly targets vulnerable farmers in rural areas across the four geographical divisions. This project also facilitates collaboration with all categories of farmers, in terms of the whole supply chain and provision of planting materials, to assist in sustaining the production of traditional root crops in relation to climate change mitigation. The budget provision has increased from \$0.5 million in 2014 to \$1 million in 2018/19. This will address the expansion of coverage, and activities such as establishment of demonstration plots, farmer trainings, field days, distribution of traditional crop & vegetable planting materials, farmer clustering and market identification and linkage. The increase in budget, has allowed the Ministry to increase the number of assisted farmers from 96 in 2014 to 597 in 2018.

Rural Outer Islands (ROI) programme

Honourable Speaker, the ROI program was designed to assist the rural and maritime communities with the intention to help rural and maritime dwellers improve their standard of living. The Ministry continue to receive a budget of \$1.5 million for the provisions of farming inputs, planting materials, machinery and many more that are needed by farmers through the submission of project proposals. Since the return of ROI program to the Ministry last year, production were achieved through the following commodities such as Cassava, Taro, Sweet Potato, Yams, Vegetables , Yaqona, Goat, Honey, Pig and Poultry to name a few which are mostly used for daily consumption.

Dalo Development Program

Honourable Speaker, through the ongoing technical assistance, farmers are trained in all levels of managing dalo farms. The aim of this project is to increase dalo production through infrastructural improvement, clustering of farmers, support services through provision of quality planting materials and agro-inputs and linking farmers to markets. In 2018 Fiji, exported \$23m worth of fresh Dalo to New Zealand, Australia and the US.

The Ministry continue to receive a budget of \$0.8 million from 2016/17 to 2018/19.

Nadarivatu Valley Agriculture Development Programme

Honourable Speaker, The project is to facilitate the expansion of high valued crops by developing market opportunities and potential farm land in the interior of Savatu, Nadrau and Nabobuco in Nadarivatu. Targeted crops include Carrots, tomatoes, celery, capsicum, and zucchini. The program will coordinate with other programs from NGO's in improving production of the selected commodities. Budget provision increased from \$150,000 in 2014 to \$350,000 in 2018/19 budget. The increase in budget has expand the scope of assistance from 9 farmers in 2014 to 45 in 2018.

Cottage Industry Programme

Honourable Speaker, the project targets committed individuals, youth and women groups with income generating projects and mainstream equality in the rural and maritime areas to assist in the production and processing of virgin coconut oil, coconut handicrafts, floriculture, cut flowers, traditional artifacts and traditional processing techniques that have readily available markets. Budget Provision has increased from \$100,000 in 2014 to \$200,000 in 2018/19. The increase in budget provision has assist in the expansion of activities and number of farmers assisted from 4 farmers in 2014 to 115 in 2018.

Tutu Training Centre

Honourable Speaker, the Young Farmers Course (YFC) was first introduced in 1983 in Tutu Training Centre with the aim to help and train young single young men, women and young couples from the province of Cakaudrove to be autonomous, responsible and mature young adults, who are able to take control of their own lives and live productively as self-employed farmers on their own land.

The Tutu Rural Training Centre had a major impact on the people of the province of Cakaudrove. Nearly 2,000 young people have completed the various courses offered by this Training Institution over the last 42 years. Most of the graduates from courses returned to productive lives, earning a livelihood from farming in their own land.

Honourable Speaker, the Crop Research Division also provide technical assistance through technical guidance, production of seeds and planting materials to be readily available for our farmers at all levels. The Ministry targets to produce 97,445kg of seeds and 553,500 planting materials in this financial year. They also provide support to Crop Extension Division on the provision of plant protection advisory services for farmers.

Honourable Speaker, those are few of the many agriculture programmes that offers a package of farming supports(technical and financial)to our rural farmers who choose

to better utilise their Mataqali land for farming at either subsistence, semi commercial or commercial level. In the last three years (2016/17-2018/19), the Ministry of Agriculture assisted 6,175 farmers under the Crop & Livestock Capital Programs.

Honourable Speaker, let me conclude by reassuring members of parliament and farmers in Fiji that the Ministry of Agriculture will continue with efforts to grow and develop the agriculture sector on an inclusive and holistic approach at all levels of farming to ensure that we achieve a productive, sustainable and resilient food system for our beloved Fiji.