

Parliament Session – Written Response
Monday 16th August. 2021

153/2021

Hon. Inosi Kuridrani to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways and Environment – Can the Minister provide an update to Parliament on the Ministry’s beef extension and beef breeding programme for the periods 2018 2019 and 2019-2020 –

- (a) the annual average ratio of livestock officers to farmers;**
- (b) distribution of the new beef cattle breed by Division and Province; and**
- (c) the effect of the programme on domestic beef production.**

1. Beef Production

Over the years Fiji’s beef industry continue to grow despite challenges faced by our farmers through outbreak of Tuberculosis and Brucellosis and impact of climate change. In the last five years (2016-2020) domestic production of beef grew at an average growth rate of 3.3% per annum. Also in the same period total stock of beef cattle throughout Fiji continue to increase at an average growth rate of 9.1% per annum despite decline in number of stock in 2020 as compared to 2019 due to high incidence of tuberculosis and back to back cyclone.

2. Ratio of Livestock Officer to Farmers

Currently the Ministry employs a total of 138 staff at our Livestock Division who engages in extension, research and B-Tech activities. Recruitment to fill vacant positions in this division is an on-going process as officers continue to retire or resign to take up better offer especially from abroad. The Ministry’s livestock Division supervises a total of 2642 beef cattle farm throughout Fiji.

One of the main challenges faced by our beef cattle farms is the limited genetic materials and poor nutrition that results in decrease in carcass weight recorded at the registered slaughter house. The Beef Breeding Program implemented by the Ministry in each financial year provides new ideas that will address such obstacles.

3. Beef Breeding Programme

Since 2017, the Beef Breeding Program focus on improving livestock breeds, feeds and enhancement of natural pastures to a level where genetic potential is expressed. It also include improving genetic material from MOA station to farmers herd.

In 2018/2019 and 2019/20 beef breeding concentrated on embryo transfer program whereby improved beef breed was introduced to Government research Station through acquiring of embryos. The Programme involves 2 phases:

- Phase 1 - where new genetics in the form of embryos were imported and a nucleus herd was established at Nacocolevu Government Station for Breed Improvement Program. Currently there is a total of 60 pure breed Senepol beef breeds ranging from 7 months to 2 and half yrs some of which are ready for breeding.
- Phase 2- Distribution of genetics – this will be undertaken through provision of bulls for natural mating and mass replication by Artificial insemination and embryo transfer on private farm. Distribution of beef cattle to farms will be implemented in this financial year through Expression of Interest.

4. Beef Extension Programme

The Beef Extension Programme in 2018/19 and 2019/20 focused mainly on farm development through provision of farm inputs, training and advisory services.

In 2018/2019 the program assisted 22 farms with fencing packages, 4 with stockyard material, 2 with agro inputs and 1 farm with land preparation and pasture. In 2019/2020, 27 beef farmers including 8 beef cluster groups were assisted with stockyards, fencing packages, agro inputs and mineral blocks. Out of which 9 farmers were assisted in the Western Division, 9 in the Central Division, 5 in the Northern Division and 4 in Eastern Division. During the same year 17 beef cluster were established and trained to improve production and ease market access. Farmers were also introduced to regular fencing trainings and field days.

To increase production and commercialize Fiji's beef industry, government will continue to assist beef farmers through pasture development, fodder bank establishment and infrastructural development. Distribution of fencing materials to beef farms will continue to secure animals and enable close monitoring. Continuous training will be provided to beef farmers throughout Fiji to enhance knowledge of existing farmers and ensure sustainability to incoming farmers. The Ministry is also promoting clustering of 10-20 small holder farms to increase beef production and ease transportation logistics for farmers. The improved Beef Breeding Programme through embryo transfer will enable production high quality beef on farms that will target high value market such as hotels and restaurants.

Improving Fiji's Beef Industry is an ongoing process that the Ministry will continue to pursue. In this financial year, apart from the normal beef breeding and beef extension annual budget, the Ministry have been allocated an extra \$400,000 for upgrading of Nasinu and Vuda abattoir with the projection that these abattoirs throughput will increase by 10% towards the end of 2022. This upgrade works will contribute immensely to enhancing quality of production and entice beef farmers to continue to expand their farm and improve their output.

END

MR