



HON. TOMASI N. TUNABUNA

Minister for Agriculture, Waterways & Sugar Industry

Ministerial Response to Written Question 79/2026

Monday 25th May 20206

79/2026 - Hon. Joseph Nand to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry – Can the Minister update Parliament with respect to the following –

(a) What is the status of the Ministry’s digital agriculture initiative as announced in the 2025 National Agriculture Show? and

(b) How many young farmers have so far accessed funding or training for smart-farming technology in 2026?

I welcome the opportunity to update this Honourable House on the: -

- Ministry’s digital agriculture initiative announced at the 2025 National Agriculture Show, and
- Youth’s access to smart-farming funding and training in 2026.

a) Status of the Ministry’s Digital Agriculture Initiative as announced in the 2025 National Agriculture Show

The 2025 National Agriculture Show theme “**Be Resilient, Produce Smart, Grow Local and Grow Agro-Tourism**”, reflected the reality and priorities of the Western Division, where agriculture and tourism are deeply interconnected. The Show reinforced the need to reduce Fiji’s reliance on imported food for the tourism sector by

strengthening local production, improving quality consistency, and increasing off-season supply.

In that context, Government allocated **FJD115 million** to the Ministry of Agriculture and Waterways in the 2025/2026 National Budget to fund digital modern farming practices, improve market access, and support farmers through capital programmes

The Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation has collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture to reconvene the National Agro-Tourism Taskforce Committee. The Taskforce, chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Tourism and Civil Aviation, has:

- met 3 times post agriculture show 2025;
- developed a draft Agro-Tourism Policy Framework, which is now at the validation stage, led by the Ministry of Tourism in close consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Waterways, and Sugar Industry, and other relevant government agencies; and
- designed a web platform intended to serve as a one-stop information hub for hotel procurement officers, chefs, farmers, fishers, agro-processors, hotel owners, and other actors in the agro-tourism value chain. This platform remains a work in progress, and we acknowledge and thank UN FAO for its ongoing support, including the upcoming Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) that will provide technical assistance towards finalising the policy and strengthening the database and digital platform to deepen agro-tourism linkages.

E-Agriculture Strategy Nearing Completion

The Ministry's approach to digital agriculture is not ad hoc. Beyond individual interventions, the Ministry has developed a National E-Agriculture Strategy, which is now on the verge of completion. This Strategy will set the direction and guide the coordinated adoption of digital innovations across the sector in a sustainable way for Fiji.

Digital Initiatives as system of Addressing Two Key Bottlenecks: Off-season Supply and Quality

Following thorough consultations with actors across the agro-tourism value chain, the Ministry has identified two key drivers of continued import reliance in the tourism market:

1. off-season supply gaps, and
2. inconsistent quality.

In response, the Ministry has designed and reviewed existing programmes to address these bottlenecks by:

- scaling up protected agriculture systems (including greenhouse and hydroponics models) to increase off-season production and improve quality;
- realigning budget allocations to support off-season farming practices and technologies;
- strengthening farmer and value-chain training to improve reliability of supply; and
- increase and improve post-harvest technologies and system using digital technologies.

“Digital Cold Chain” Infrastructure for Agro-Processors

On the processing and supply side, the Ministry has supported cold storage, refrigerated delivery trucks, and quality crates as they are fundamental pillars for enabling quality supply into tourism markets. Under the realigned Commercial Agriculture Development Programme, these investments constitute the physical foundation of a “digital cold chain”—a system designed to reduce post-harvest losses and maintain food quality.

These facilities and vehicles become part of digital agriculture through the integration of modern systems and technologies, including improved handling protocols, traceability and inventory management approaches, and quality-control processes. Importantly, the Ministry is ensuring that the pace of mechanisation and innovation for farmers and agro-processors progresses **in parallel**, so that production increases are matched with appropriate post-harvest and market-handling capacity—avoiding bottlenecks and oversupply losses.

Implementation Approach: Deliberate, Inclusive, and Sustainable.

The Ministry is taking a deliberate and inclusive approach to ensure digital systems are sustainable and accessible across all regions, including the rural and maritime communities. The pace of implementation is guided by important considerations, including:

- the need to strengthen rural infrastructure, including connectivity and access;
- building digital literacy among farmers;
- integrating systems across agencies and stakeholders; and
- balancing digital transformation with priorities such as climate resilience, food security and production support.

These are not constraints, but necessary safeguards to ensure the transformation is inclusive, sustainable and effective.

Way Forward

Looking ahead, the Ministry will focus on:

- scaling up digital service delivery,
- strengthening agricultural data systems,
- enhancing real-time market access, and
- leveraging partnerships to accelerate innovation and uptake.

The Government remains committed to advancing digital agriculture as a key pillar of sector transformation, ensuring Fijian farmers can participate in a modern, efficient and resilient agricultural economy.

(b) Young farmers accessing funding or training for smart-farming technology in 2026

Young farmers are not only future contributors to national food security—they are already drivers of innovation, modernisation, and climate resilience. In 2026, the Ministry prioritised youth participation by expanding access to financing support, training, and exposure to practical smart-farming technologies.

Youth Supported in 2026

To date in 2026, the Ministry has supported a total of 420 young farmers who have accessed funding support and/or training in smart-farming technology across Fiji.

These programmes and activities focused on:

- rainwater harvesting,
- value addition,
- soil health,
- climate-smart agriculture practices, and
- organic agronomy.

Institutional Skills Development

To build a sustainable pipeline of climate-resilient young operators, the Ministry invested **FJD \$4.4 million** to upgrade formal youth training facilities. As a result:

- 125 young trainees are currently undertaking long-term residencies at the Navuso Agricultural Technical Institute (NATI) and the Tutu Training Centre.
- Their curriculum includes hands-on instruction in climate-smart food production, sustainable agroforestry, and business management tools.

Field Technology & Climate-Resilient Research Rollout

The Ministry's research and extension teams—supported by the Land Resource Planning and Development Division—have driven practical agritech training directly to the farm gate. Of the young farmers engaged this year:

- training has included simple, affordable climate-smart technologies such as solar-powered water pumps for drip irrigation systems, hydroponics, rainwater harvesting, and value addition; and
- young farmers have also been introduced to data-driven farming, including Sustainable Land Management practices using data from the Pacific Soil Portal, which applies digital mapping to support better fertiliser and land-use decisions.

Moving Forward in 2026 and Beyond

To sustain momentum, the Ministry has launched a **NZD \$338,350** Collaboration Agreement through the Climate Smart Pacific Food Systems Programme, in

partnership with the New Zealand Institute for Bioeconomy Science Limited (Plant & Food Research Group). Located at the Sigatoka Research Station, this collaboration will support hundreds more young people through co-designed, science-driven agricultural tracks through 2028, blending climate science with indigenous and local knowledge.

Strategic Conclusion

The Ministry's digital agriculture initiative has reached a critical transition point—from pilot and design to scale and system integration.

Key achievements demonstrate strong foundations:

1. A near-complete National E-Agriculture Strategy to guide transformation;
2. Active agro-tourism integration efforts, including policy development and a digital platform;
3. Identification of structural bottlenecks: off-season supply gaps and inconsistent quality;
4. Initial rollout of production technologies (protected agriculture) and post-harvest systems (digital cold chain); and
5. Strong investment in youth engagement (420 young farmers supported, institutional training pipelines).

The challenge is no longer conceptualisation—it is now about scaling, integration, and investment efficiency. Without coordinated scaling, fragmented gains may fail to reduce import dependence or fully supply the tourism market.

Ends