

# First organic certified product launched in Fiji

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## Transcript

**Fiji's first organic certified product has been launched and it's expected others will follow as more farmers are encouraged to return to traditional growing methods.**



Lemon grass tea. Photo: Supplied

**Lemon grass tea was launched by local NGO, the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development, known as FRIEND, last week. Its director Sashi Kiran says 50 farmers are**

**supplying lemon grass tea in Vanua Levu and western Viti Levu. She told Bridget Tunnicliffe the process to certify the product, with the help of EU funding, was a long one.**

SASHI KIRAN: We had to have the farmers first of all convinced that they would like to go organic and once they decided yes they would like to go organic we had to work on the crops that they could plant, we had to measure the area that they wanted organic certified, do soil testing to see whether there were any chemical remains in it and there were various types of testing that had to go through both in Fiji and we sent the soils to Australia to see whether there were any remains of any of the chemicals. After that we had to do a lot of training on organic manure, organic pesticides, so organic herbicides because it's been too easy to get pesticides off the shelf. So all that training had to be done then we worked on ploughing with them, replanting with them and then from there once they got into it then the certification committees were set up and then it goes through a certifying process and a certifying body so this was our first organic mark after working on it for two to three years. The whole thing about organic for FRIEND is not only putting a product out there that's healthy and it's not got chemicals but it's also trying to get sustainable agriculture back, trying to look at how nature works in agriculture for health and sustainability. So it feeds into a larger programme of socio-economic health.

BRIDGET TUNNICLIFFE: Are there other crops that could potentially become organically certified?

SK: Oh yes, we developed gluten free flour from root crop so we're trying to get that certified so it will be organic gluten free. We are trying to certify the rest of the herbal teas which is basil tea, [inaudible] - which is a traditional root growing up in the hills, traditional kava, organic tea, rosella organic tea. Cinnamon is growing in the wild so we're trying to certify that as well and dried banana and papaya. So we've already been working on it but before the end of the year we hope to have a few more organic certified products in the market.

BT: Do you think the farmers have been quite adaptable to the processes of growing organic friendly products?

SK: Traditionally our traditional farming methods were all organic, it was only later that chemicals were introduced so going back to growing traditional, like for a lot of root crops and a lot of herbal things that they have, it's already organic, they just don't call it organic but they really don't use chemicals, they have been using traditional inter-cropping methods to develop that. It hasn't been that hard so just re-educating on the benefits of it has got us back.

**Sashi Kiran says they've had interest in exporting the lemon grass tea.**