



Labasa Farmer Conference Draws participants in large numbers

The largest hall that could be found in town was Vanua Levu Muslim League hall and even that was packed to brim as around 500 farmers from 25 communities in Macuata participated in the first GROW Farmer Conference held in the Northern Division.

The event was officiated by the head of the Pacific delegation of the European Union, Mr Andrew Jacobs.

Farmers who are actively participating in poultry and cash crop projects funded by the European Union came together to share information.

Director Sashi Kiran says, "The numbers showed the demand for spaces where farmers could share information and experience amongst the benefi-

ciaries to help each other grow in their projects."

"One of the key project activities in the North focuses on supporting farmers with growing of Cash Crop through promotion of large scale farming of commodities for which FRIEND guarantees the market, like maize and lentils."

Farmers expressed that various challenges that deter them from farming include, "Lack of money to prepare land", "Unavailability of seeds", "Lack of access to technical advice", "No market", "Transportation to the market", "Water problems," etc.

The EU funds have assisted bridge these gaps for more than 200 cash crop farmers in Macuata.

GROW Poultry is also a key program activity in the North. The poultry projects aim to address the ongoing shortage of poultry supplies in the North.

"Currently most of the chicken and eggs sold in the market come from Viti Levu," says FRIEND Team Leader Labasa Makareta Tawa.

"One of the key reasons why farmers are hesitant to venture into large scale poultry farms is the cost of feed."

"We are looking at growing feed for home fed poultry to ensure sustainability of our projects," says Ms Tawa.

Each of the 80 project holders in Labasa is encouraged to plant their own feed to reduce the cost of production.





CU Technical Manger Mohammed Habib, CU Team Leader Andrew Winter-Taylor, EU Xavier Canton Lamouse, EU Head of Delegation Mr Andrew Jacobs and FRIEND Founder/Director Sashi Kiran outside the conference venue.

THE European Union says it is pleased with the progress of FRIEND's efforts in reaching out to farmers through the assistance provided by the European Union.

Addressing around 500 farmers at the Farmers Conference in Labasa, EU Head of Delegation, Mr Andrew Jacobs said that, EU is providing assistance to farmers, focussing on activities that would deliver and maximise poverty reduction in the most affected populations.

"The EU tax payers' money is thus used to help reduce hardship among farmers who are affected the most by the restructuring of the industry," said Mr Jacobs. Mr Jacobs interacted with farmers, saw the poultry models and sample of food processing by community members before visiting other EU funded projects in Macuata.

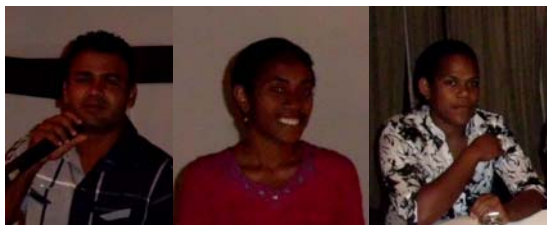
Understanding Leadership

The field experiences of three FRIEND officers has contributed in development of a toolkit on Participatory Governance and Leadership at the Pearl Resort this month.

The 2 day session was organized by Foundation of the People for the South Pacific International and ANSA- EAP (Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific.)

GROW Officer Mela Salacakau says, it was interesting hearing of various ways other NGO's work with their community leaders to influence changes for community development.

Salacakau says they are looking forward to trialing the toolkit put together during the workshop in the coming weeks.



Farmers Hold the Key to NCD Control

A surgical registrar says the Labasa Hospital is currently conducting an average of one foot surgery a day resulting from diabetes related complications.

Speaking at the Farmers Conference in Labasa this month, Dr Jone Vuli Hawea said despite his busy schedule, he welcomed the opportunity to address the conference

269 surgical foot operations for diabetes from February 2012 to February 2013.

Dr Jone believes one of the key reasons for the high rate of such complications stem from improper or no footwear.

"Our people are fond of walking barefoot everywhere," he told the conference, " And

especially those who already know about their diabetic condition need to invest in shoes that are padded to prevent any abrasions or bruises that tend to result from ill fitting shoes."

Dr Jone has developed and also launched the Play for Health competition titled "Mela Na Waqe". The first event is scheduled to be held in Nubu village.

The competition is aimed at encouraging those over 40 into more active



as it meant talking directly to those who had the power to change the eating habits of people. 'Because of what they plant and produce,' says Dr Jone.

He says the farmers also have a better choice on fresh and healthy fruits and vegetables and apart from farming commercially they need to plant for subsistence use so they can eat locally produced food instead of resorting to the processed alternatives.

Labasa Hospital has conducted a total of

lifestyles.

"We only hope people make the right choices by eating the right food and exercise daily so such diseases are controlled," says Dr Jone Hawea.



Wellness Workshop for the North

Two out of 10 people in Fiji suffer from diabetes, says Northern divisional medical officer Dr Pablo Romakin.

Speaking at a health workshop organized by FRIEND Dr Romakin said in order to address the issue of the increase in NCDs, "we need to harvest wellness within us".

"Wellness is not just about being free from disease but rather physically well, mentally well, socially well, spiritually well, emotionally well and financially well," he said.



"We need to work together to make our communities a healthy place to work, play and leisure where our environment and ocean sustain us.

Community Leaders and Health workers attended the 2 day planning workshop organized by FRIEND SMILE program to promote healthy living in the communities.

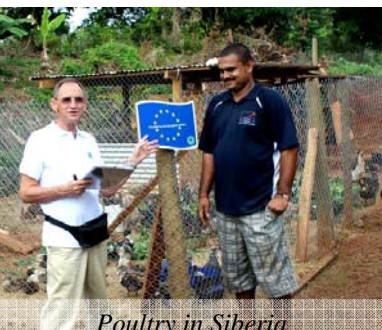
SMILE is currently working in rural communities in the North for prevention and better management of lifestyle diseases through health checks, provision of chronic medication and promotion of backyard gardens and livelihood projects.



EU Monitoring Team Visits Northern Projects

The EU Coordinating Unit comprising of Team Leader Mr Andrew Winter-Taylor and Technical Manager, Mohammed Habib, visited some GROW projects in the North this month.

GROW projects in the North include Poultry, Cash Crop and Food Processing activities using EU funds assisting farmers and their families in order to cushion the impacts of industry restructuring.



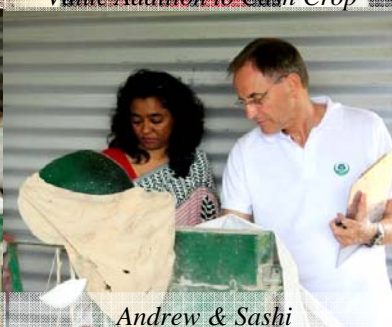
Poultry in Siberia



Value Addition to Cash Crop



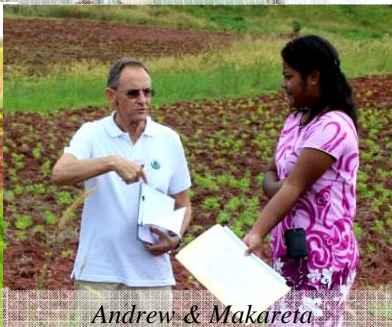
Feed Production



Andrew & Sashi



Into the fields



Andrew & Makareta

Irrigation Trial Brings Smiles

The Pilot Irrigation project set up by GROW in Tavua is due to yield it's first crop next month.

Farmer Abhimanyu says he is looking forward to the harvest as his staged planting of Tomatoes, Bongo Chillies and Capsicum is expected to provide him a net income of around \$3,000 dollars per month.

Mr Abhimanyu says since his cane lease expired in 2011 he had been struggling to plant vegetables for income, but this had been very difficult in dry months.

The irrigation project has been overseen by Australian Volunteer, Mr Egberto Soto.

Mr Soto is an experienced Senior Agronomist having worked in various Agriculture projects in Peru and Australia.

"The main challenge in designing a solution for the farm lay in sourcing of appropriate material for the project," says Mr Soto.

"A good water source is also very important for the project."

The current set up covers 1/8th of an acre.

"We have put together a design that is not too complicated and can be expanded by farmers," says Mr Soto.



Farmer Trainings for Self Esteem Building

Around 50 farmers from Sigatoka to Rakiraki have had a chance to meet and share ideas on best practices for increased yields as well as sustainability of their farms through a series of workshops held this month.

“Although I have been farming for years, it is now after going through this training that I realize, that we need to change our farming practices to ensure that the fields remain fer-

tile for our future generations,” said a delegate following one of the workshops in his area.

FRIEND enlisted the assistance from Tei Tei Taveuni (TTT) to capitalize on their practical experience on the ground.

TTT is an NGO formed by a group of farmers with an interest in sustainable farming, soil regeneration, food security, conservation, and

environmental awareness. The organization was founded following a meeting in Taveuni in 2009 to discuss soil depletion and deforestation that was threatening the income potential of the island farmers.

TT Trainer Peter Haynes says they believe the farmers themselves are “the experts” in their communities, and sharing ideas could strengthen capacities.



Planting for food and fuel

“There are lots of plants we can grow and utilize locally, says Mrs Suliana Siwatibau.

A health food advocate, Mrs Siwatibau addressed the Farmer Conference in Labasa on the merits of growing organic gardens bringing with her a variety

of traditionally grown plants and crops.

Encouraging the participants to explore the lifestyles and diets of their forefathers, she said, “We should plant, not only for food, but also for fuel,” she says.

Her assortment of produce included ariel yams that she says can be used in place of potatoes and “Sikau” a wild plant that can be propagated and used as green fuel in place of chopping trees for firewood to combat the rising fuel prices.



Recipe Corner— Fresh Ota in Miti

Ingredients:

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1 Bundle Fresh Ota | Lemon Juice |
| 1 Fresh Tomato cut into cubes | Chillies to taste |
| 1 Onion chopped in cubes | 1 Coconut (grate and extract thick lolo/milk) |

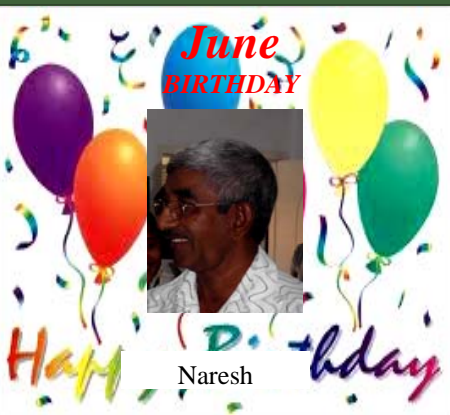
Method

1. Clean Ota and steam cook for 2– 4 minutes.
2. Blanch in cold water. Drain well.
3. Mix in lemon juice and leave to stand for 5 minutes.
4. Mix in the rest of ingredients and serve.

Serving suggestion:

Serve with a slice of Yam or Dalo for a healthy meal.





Dried Nutrition



Women in communities are exploring healthy food choices for families through our food processing workshops.

The training includes drying of fruits, herbs and root crops.

“We look at what is available in communities that they can use to supplement their meals as well as develop it for incomes,” says Mereani Lomavere of FRIEND.



Rakiraki Youths Learn Employability Skills

A group of 20 youths from Rakiraki have embarked on the 8- month GROW YEN training program.

A total of 80 applications were received for this course.

“This reflects the demand for the service provided by the programme,” says Sandhya

Narayan. “Our first batch of 20 students who had participated in GROW YEN in Lautoka have already graduated while those who participated in Nadi, Ba and Tavua are in various stages of completion of work attachments.”

“This will allow them to gain essential experience to prepare

them to enter the labour market,” says Sandhya. The program targets youths from families affected by the decline in the Sugar Industry .

The session was officially opened on 10th June by Senior Educational Officer for Rakiraki , Mr Atendra Kumar.

Organics for the Future



Makareta Tawa, Team Leader Labasa.

Tawa has just returned from a regional workshop organized by SPC /POET Program in Vanuatu.

“We are already working with

“I would like to see a stronger understanding and practice of organic farming in Fiji,” says

35 interested farmers in the North, but this is still very early stages for us.” says Tawa.

“The Vanuatu workshop has provided scope for a deeper understanding of how

“One that that stood out for me was that our farmers have to start thinking about switching to organic fertilizers and for this they will need to start off their



own compost heaps,” says Tawa.

A composting workshop for organic farmers is planned in the North in the coming month.

Disaster Mitigated Nurseries through AUSAID

AUSAID has approved funding of around \$85,000 FJD for construction of 3 nurseries this year.

The nurseries project is expected to address the supply of planting material in communities following disasters.

This would ensure that there is food security for families at the earliest when floods or cyclones affect these areas.

The projects are ear marked for Rakiraki, Labasa and Yasawas.

Communitu reps from Yasawas meet with FRIEND Director Sashi Kiran at FRIEND HQ with the AUSAID Project Management FCDP Team

