

Food security tops agri focus

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AGRICULTURE is becoming an important topic in the region in terms of food in relation to nutritional security and non-communicable diseases.

To this extent, the food debate at the University of the South Pacific (USP) on Tuesday night highlighted the importance of food on climate change, economic development, its impact on livelihoods and all aspects of sustainable development.

With the topic "Organics can feed the Pacific", agricultural experts put their points across on the question "Should we be using harmful chemicals in our food supplies?"

The debate also marked the European Union's Year of Development October theme of food security, the International Year of Soil and World Food Day in promoting food and nutritional security.

On the affirmative side were the president of the IFOAM-Organics International Andre Leu, director of the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises and Development (FRIEND) Sashi Kiran and young farmer Andrew Weleilakeba. On the opposing side was chairman for the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network Afamasaga Toleafoa, USP academic Professor Randy Thaman and commercial farmer Wah Sing Yee.

The debate was organised by the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom) and supported by the European Union through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Increasing Agriculture Commodities and Trade program.

POETCom co-ordinator Karen Mapusua said the important part was not who won the debate but the issues that were put on the table and discussed.

"Food nutrition security is an important topic in the Pacific as we know we are increasingly dependent on foods which are imported," Ms Mapusua said.

According to her, this is what makes the Pacific Island people vulnerable as price fluctuates in other markets and more costly to import goods.

And at the same time, she said, some of those imported food contributed to one of the Pacific's main problems, NCDs.