

EU grants FRIEND FIJI \$2.8 million to help farmers

by

Andrew Jacobs, European Union resident representative to Fiji (sixth from left) with representatives at the GROW Conference in Girit Centre Lautoka. PHOTO SHEIK DEAN.

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The European Union has awarded a grant of FJD\$6.4 million (EUR\$2.8 million) to the non-government organisation FRIEND Fiji to help revive the agriculture industry.

Under EU's Social Mitigation Programme, FRIEND Fiji will be able to provide assistance to farmers in the hope of reducing poverty through productivity.

Last week, FRIEND Fiji held its GROW Conference at the Girit Centre in Lautoka.

The conference was a platform to showcase the achievements of farmers and share farming techniques for greater productivity.

According to FRIEND Fiji, the grant will be used in different areas such as the provision of seedlings, fertilizers and farming equipment.

Farmers who have left farming were encouraged to return. They were also shown how crops such as lemon grass and star apple, which are abundantly in supply in Fiji, can be a good source of income.

Addressing poverty through sugar industry

Chief Guest Andrew Jacobs, resident representative for the EU to Fiji said that despite the moderate growth in Fiji, poverty has been on the rise in rural areas.

"The restructuring of the sugar industry has affected a lot of farmers and through this programme the EU is helping them rebuild their lives," said Mr Jacobs.

FRIEND Fiji Director Sashi Kiran said, the GROW together programme will engage farmers in the western and northern divisions, especially those who were affected by the falling sugar price and high harvesting costs.

"Through this programme, different varieties of crops were identified which can be preserved in a sanitized environment for extended shelf life."

"On behalf of the organization I thank the EU for the continuous help and support for the farmers in alleviating poverty," added Ms Kiran.

FRIEND Fiji has been working with the EU since 2012.