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A responsible agricultural way to produce food

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ORGANIC agriculture is a responsible way to produce food and promotes the sanctity of human life, both farmers and consumers.

This was the view of Dr Asif Chida, who is the team leader for inclusive growth at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Pacific Office in Suva.

Speaking at the recent launch of a growing organics booklet, Dr Chida said the benefit of growing organic was because it banned the use of harmful chemicals.

He said it also encouraged healthy diets based on natural, nutritious foods which neatly linked with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 on good health and wellbeing of everyone.

"Organic agriculture utilises practical agro-ecological (natural) methods that produce healthy foods for consumption in environmentally sound ways," he said. "Great for waste management, which is a huge problem in the Pacific Islands, organic agriculture utilises waste to make composts and mulches, which reduce the need for landfills and burning waste.

"It's also safe for our drinking water sources."

Dr Chida also highlighted that organic farming was also the agriculture of choice for the United Nations Sustainable Food Systems program developed within the 10-year framework for sustainable consumption and production patterns.

"The Organic Food Systems program (OFSP) is one of the core initiatives of the Sustainable Food Systems program," he said.

"Heavily, chemically fortified foods that are usually imported and farm chemicals have been linked to the occurrence of various non-communicable diseases (NCDs)."

Dr Chida said the need for organic farming also came at a time where NCDs were plaguing our Pacific and was is the leading cause of deaths.

Dr Jone Hawea, a medical doctor and co-director of the Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprise & Development (FRIEND) also highlighted that chemical-based pesticide was contributing to high incidences of NCDs.

He said the food people consumed nowadays were causing a lot of illnesses and diseases because of the unseen, man-made chemicals present in them.

"Many of these unseen chemicals come from the sprays used in farms, storage rooms and containers to kill unwanted insects (pesticides) and unwanted or overgrown grass and bushes (weedicides).

"If these chemicals are repeatedly eaten, over time, the body's natural repair systems break down and diseases take over."

According to the acting director of the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETCom), Stephen Hazelman, a survey that was earlier done in Fiji revealed that some vegetables collected from various markets contained chemical residues after being tested.

He said the findings were shocking as even chemicals that were banned proved to be present in these vegetables.

Meanwhile, FRIEND, a community development NGO and enterprise, has spearheaded initiatives in response to this developing Fiji's first comprehensive guides on tried and tested methods of naturally managing crop pests.

The two guides, Organics Simplified booklet and FRIEND Participatory Guarantee System guidelines are expected to assist up to 600 farmers to implement organic certification of their farms.

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