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WELCOME

It is my pleasure as the Permanent Secretary of MAL to present to you our new look monthly newsletter. It has been six years since our last publication and a lot of work has been done over recent past as we continued to srtive in service delivery to fulfill MAL's vision and mission. This is a special publication since its distribution will be accessed by the public, SIG ministries, stakeholders unlike previous newsletter publications where only produced for internal used/circulation. This is a wonderful opportunity for MAL to embrace this communication medium and to fully maximize its capacity to disseminate agricultural news, stories and information to meet the needs of its readers. This is the first edition of our new look newsletter, thus, we're grateful that you're taking your time to read it. This issue covers MAL's acheivements over the months of July-August, 2020. This publication is produced by MAL information & Media Unit team.

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Partnership brings hope for rural women farmers

Rural women farmers in the Guadalcanal Plains has expressed gratitude to the government through the Ministry of the Agriculture and Livestock for bringing market opportunities right down to their doorsteps.

This came after 44 cassava out-growers signed a partnership agreement with the government through MAL and Sape farm management on 17 July 2020.

"I see this partnership as an opportunity for us women," Wendy Saki Besa'a told MAL Media in an interview on behalf of her other women colleague recipients.

Mrs. Besa'a was amongst the first fortunate 44 recipients who struck a deal with the government through MAL and Sape farm under the Sape farm out-growers scheme. Of the 44, ten (10) are women including Wendy Besa'a.

Under the Sape farm out-growers scheme, farmers will sold all their cassava and potato produces to Sape farm pack-house under the out-growers scheme farm gate.

"This is really a boost for us rural women farmers who often struggle to find market to sell our produces (cassava and potato).

"Market is always a challenge for us, but, that would be now a thing of the past.

"We thank the Democratic Coalition Government for Advancement



Wendy Saki Besa'a.

(DCGA) through MAL for recognizing one of our needs and for bringing market opportunity at our doorstep through this partnership initiative.

"This will really help us especially rural women in the Guadalcanal Plains and at the same time saves money and time than traveling to the Honiara Central Market to sell our cassava and potato produces.

"This is a direct benefit from government to the grass roots. Therefore, we thank the government for the approach," Mrs. Besa'a said.

Mrs. Besa'a also recognised Dr. Paul Popora for the establishment of Sape farm.

She said that Dr. Popora sets an example that many hard working farmers out there should follow suit.

of us have decent homes.

"This will improve our living standard and we will see us as assets and not liabilities. Cassava is our brown gold. We thank the Government for seeing the need to support us rural farmers through this initiative," Mrs. Besa'a added.

The Permanent Secretary of MAL Ethel Tebengi Frances was excited with the partnership initiative and looking forward to working closely with Sape Farm management and the out growers and farmers around the country to grow the root crop and guarantee it recognized as an industry as MAL embarks on plans to revive the agriculture sector.

Meanwhile, Sape Farm Managing Director, Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora said the number of women who wants to be part of the out-grower scheme is expecting to increase in the future as many women has expressed their interest and wanted to register. In May this year 2020, the Government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) and Sape farm management signed a 2.7 million funding support agreement that will see cassava root crop transform into an industry in the future. The funding agreement and partnership is an initiative to support the government's Food Security Programme. The funding support agreement will cater for farming machineries and tools, processing and refrigeration machines and working capital.

"Let us not be spectators, but, be initiators. Let us cultivate our God given land for our benefit.

"God always help those who always help themselves. We cannot just sit back and ask God to give. We must labour and show our part that we are ready to receive from God.

"If you what to become some body, you must work hard. Your efforts will get you to somewhere someday," Mrs. Besa'a emphasized. She also thanked the government through MAL for recognizing Cassava root crop as an industry.

"Cassava does not require hard labour like cocoa and coconut industry does. "We are optimistic that this partnership will really change our livelihood and transform our standard of living. "We are very close to Honiara but not every one



Sape Farm Managing Director, Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora and the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock, Permanent Secretary, Ethel Frances at Sape farm after the signing of the partnership.



Wendy Saki Besa'a, a cassava out-grower got her signed agreement from MAL PS, Ethel Frances as Sape Farm Managing Director, Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora (right) and Undersecretary Technical Michael Ho'ota (from back row) looks on.

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Fight against CRB still on

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) through its Biosecurity division has recommended its clean-up operation in Honiara to control the deadly Coconut Rhinoceros Beetle (CRB) that is threatening the country's coconut industry and other palms.

Work was briefly stopped due to the Covid-19 pandemic but once more resumed in early July, 2020.

The clean-up exercise will see MAL Biosecurity Officers visiting infected sites in and

around Honiara town to cut down dead coconut trees, chopped trunks into smaller sizes and transported to disposal sites for burning.

Director of Biosecurity, Mr Francis Tsatsia said this is a 50 day operation but due to the restrictions from Covid-19 work was temporarily halted.

However, he said that since the Covid-19 is now easing its restrictions they decided to restart the operation early July and will continue on for the next remaining 30 days.

"For the next 30 days, dead



Coconut trunks, beetles and larvae's are destroyed/burned.



palms will be cut down, trunks chopped into smaller sizes and transported to disposal sites for burning. Breeding sites and potential breeding sites are also earmarked for the clean-up operation. "Another means of controlling the beetle population is by using Green Muscardine fungus (GMF) a biological agent used to kill CRB-G," Mr. Tsatsia said.

Director Tsatsia urges plantation owners as well as Honiara residents to remove and dispose dead palms should they find it in their areas.

He added that MAL Biosecurity Officers will continue to monitor trap-pings and carry out surveillance over infected areas.

The coconut rhinoceros beetle (CRB), *Oryctes rhinoceros*, was discovered in Honiara in January 2015. Coconut industry and other palms are vulnerable to the invasive pest attack.

MAL reiterates committment to economic growth

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has reaffirmed its commitment to support the growth of the country's economy through partnership.

Minister for MAL Hon. Minister, Senley Levi Filualea, MP, stated the commitment in his 42nd Independence Anniversary congratulatory message, 7th July 2020.

"MAL is committed to support the growth of our economy through partnership with you and this is a commitment that we can only deliver with your support and dedication. Let us be more determined than ever before to work harder."

Hon. Minister Filualea said that undertaking farming is a worthy profession as it offers a secured future if you chose that path.

"We (MAL) are here to support you secure that future for you and your children.

"We are committed to nurture agriculture entrepreneurs who will change the way we do agriculture undertaking in this country of ours by investing in commercial agriculture and livestock development because by this we can create more jobs, harness trade and market opportunities, improve the lives of our people and build a stronger economy than it is today," he emphasised.

Meanwhile, on Covid-19, Minister Filualea said the country is going through tough times due to the pandemic that is causing death and starvation globally.

"Many people are now without jobs due to the impacts of this COVID-19 and there is much fear of starvation but know that our food and liveli-



Minister for MAL Hon. Minister, Senley Levi Filualea, MP.

hood is secured in the vast land we own. Our sustenance lies on the natural resources our country is blessed with.

"MAL believes that we can make it through these tough times if we go back and cultivate our land. The richness of our land and sea resources is our food and livelihood assurances and security. Let us go back therefore and toil the land," he added.

In May 2020 the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock signed an exciting project worth SBD2.4million dollar with Food Works Supplies Ltd for hatchery and feed mill services.

Following that millstone realization to improve and lead agriculture development in the country, the Ministry (MAL) again sealed another SBD 2.7 million funding agreement with the management of SAPE Farm representative Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora as the first partner to support the government with the priority objective to improve and increase local food production to guarantee the country have the capability to survive looming food shortage in such trying times.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock vision is to develop cassava into an industry like cocoa and coconut.

"There is so much opportunities in this crop. Besides plans to export and local consumption, the cassava will be farmed as feed crop for local feed production program MAL plans to also roll out soon. As long as there is increase in livestock, there will be huge demand for this crop. Good thing is that it can be easily grown anywhere therefore offers an income generating opportunity for our people," Permanent Secretary for MAL Ethel Tebengi Frances said. The Permanent Secretary said it is an exciting program as she is looking forward to.

During the Sape Farm launching ceremony two weeks ago, the Permanent Secretary said that "while the government may have funds to support our people participate in agriculture undertakings, most importantly is finding the right partner who can deliver, someone who is committed to make it work for themselves and this country". She urges all recipients of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock funding support to be committed to what they say they will deliver.

Permanent Secretary for MAL Mrs. Frances earlier said that she wants to see more local meat products in shops around the country and local food production is improved. The PS believes we can do it because if other countries agriculture sector can thrive so can we, but, we need a change in the way we see government support as not just a project but a national investment that it is channelled through each Solomon Islanders.

Mrs. Frances thanked the government for its continuous support towards MAL national undertakings.

From page 10

Government gets major funding boost towards Covid-19 response

1. Will see situational assessments conducted on the main effects of COVID-19 on agri-food systems, food insecurity and nutrition, with expected trends analysed and recommendations formulated on potential responses for achieving more sustainable and resilient food systems.
2. Will see fisheries-dependent households supported and fisheries and aquaculture supply chains maintained in selected countries.
3. Will see agriculture and livestock production systems enhanced in selected countries for food security and nutrition.

Speaking on behalf of FAO, country representative and former MAL Permanent Secretary, Jimi Saelea said FAO is pleased

to be able to assist Solomon Islands Government and people prepare and respond to the COVID-19 pandemic where food and nutrition security and food safety are priority.

"Not forgetting that livelihoods strengthening is crucial currently for families to be able to chart through these turbulent times of the pandemic.

"In supporting and working closely with the Livelihoods Sector Committee and its members, especially the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Honiara City Council, provincial authorities, and other UN Agencies, it is hoped that the projects will be implemented successfully despite

the restrictions which may affect travel for international project consultants," Mr. Saelea said.

Permanent Secretary of MAL, Ethel Frances thanked FAO for the generous support and for their continuous assistance towards government through the ministry of Agriculture and Livestock national undertakings.

PS Ethel said having such support from international reputable organization's like FAO in this trying time is reassuring and she is looking forward to the implementation of the projects.

The Permanent Secretary added that strengthening the country's local food systems (impacted by COVID-19) by pro-

moting climate-resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture value chains is crucial.

Livelihoods Sector Committee (LSC) is headed by MAL with its members including the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Honiara City Council, provincial authorities, and other UN Agencies.

LSC is working to ensure people's livelihood is properly managed following government's declaration of the public state of emergency in March 2020 through assessment of current food stock levels in Honiara and other satellite markets.

MAL team visits Adaliua farm

A delegation from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has visited Adaliua farm in Central Kwara'ae Malaita Province from 15th-17th July 2020.

Chief Administration Officer, Hubert Gua headed the team, which consisted of Farm Manager, James Ernest, Deputy Director Research, Martin Jaiki and Andrew Lapo, Asset and Verification Officer.

The purpose of the visit was to meet with farm workers there and dialogue over important issues related to their employment, verify a research site that has been identified on the site for research activities and also conducted asset verification on MAL office in Auki.

Prior to visiting Adaliua farm, the delegation made a courtesy call to the Premier of Malaita Province, Daniel Suidani on Thursday 16 July, informing him of their (MAL team) presence



The delegation at the Adaliua farm, Malaita Province.

and the purpose of the visit. Welcoming the delegation, Premier Suidani said his government is pleased with the visit and thus looking forward to explore opportunities that will guarantee the Province (Malaita) collaborate with productive sectors like Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on development activities that will benefit its people.

Premier Suidani said his only wish is to see the national government inject more support towards the agriculture sector. He added that there are hectares of available land for agriculture development but making sure right mechanisms are placed on farming sites like Adaliua farm and across the four (4) regions of the province (Malaita) is paramount.

Mr. Suidani said his government will ensure it collaborate with responsible ministries to bring about agriculture development on Malaita for the benefit of its people and the nation as a whole and at the same time fulfil the aspirations of the provincial and national government.

Team leader, Chief Administration Officer, Hubert Gua said it was a fruitful discussion as the Premier pledged his bold support towards agriculture development in the province and across the whole country.

Mr. Gua said having such gesture of support from people of such hierarchy is reassuring to the national undertaking that the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock is implementing.

A refresher workshop was also held for MAL officers in Auki.

83 farmers trained on vegetable gardening

A total of 83 people has undertaken a one-day demonstration training on basic vegetable gardening in Honiara on 4th September 2020. Officers from the Extension Department within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) facilitated the training for participants who are recipients of the Covid-19 seedling distribution under the Covid-19 Livelihood Sector Program.

The focused was mainly on soil mixing, seed sowing, pricking and transplanting.

Conducted at three designated zones in Honiara City - West Honiara (Tinge Ridge), Central Honiara (Mbokonavera 2) and East Honiara (Gilbert Camp), the training was intended to:

- Improve participants knowledge and skills on vegetable gardening at

home

- Increase participants backyard garden with variety of vegetables
- Improve nursery, pricking and transplanting stages
- Know the importance of Food Security – having access to fresh vegetables at all times at homes
- Prepare themselves (participants) in terms of livelihood in case of a lockdown amidst the CORVID19 pandemic.

Director of the Extension Department, MAL Andrew Melanolu while commending his officers for the successful exercise (training) said sharing the right information to people with knowledge and skills to improve their vegetable gardening is critical. Mr. Menanolu said he believes from the training participants will be able to manage and improve their back-

yard gardening to subsidize food cost.



Here and below are picture's highlights of the demonstration training.

The training was a success." The training also offered an opportunity for participants to interact and share together on vegetable gardening through question and open discussion and at the same time enable them to learn about the importance of nursery

management up to transplanting and the importance of improving soil for vegetable gardening. Australian Government (DFAT) in partnership with UNDP supported the program and implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock as a preparedness strategy incline to the Covid-19 strategy plan.



Efforts to contain 'African Swine Fever'

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) through its Biosecurity division is scaling up its 'African Swine Fever' preparedness efforts to contain any possible importation of the viral disease into the country.

African swine fever (ASF) is a highly transmittable viral disease of domestic and wild pigs, which is responsible for serious economic and production losses.

Director of Biosecurity, Mr Francis Tsatsia said as part of the Ministry's preparedness/awareness strategy they are making all efforts and taking measures to ensure the country is protected from the virus-related disease.

"The good news is, ASF is not present in Solomon Islands, but there are reported cases recorded in Papua New Guinea (PNG) which is a concern to us and we must not take it lightly but take necessary measures to stop it from entering the country.

"MAL is putting out information about the disease, most likely places of high risk and at the same time developing an emergency response plan.

"This needs a lot of technical input and the understanding of the general public especially our swine (pigs) farmers which is very critical," he said.

He added that awareness materials including signboards, posters and videos have

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been distributed to Choiseul, Western Provinces and Honiara. We still need to cover at least seven provinces.

"...measures the Ministry is taking include the current temporary stop order of pork import from all ASF positive countries. It was reported that even process luncheon meat found to also a carrier of the virus. So the ban also include luncheon meat," Mr. Tsatsia stated.

"Other measures include increased interventions at the country's border. This includes intensified screening for pork products at our airports and post-office centres. We have placed ASF signage at our two international airports so that travelers know what is at stake and encouraged to declare pork products."

Mr. Tsatsia stated that MAL have sanctioned a stronger

enforcement approach to biosecurity breaches and will be focusing on pork and other meat items.

"Travelers who provide false or misleading information can receive an infringement notice with a penalty sum of \$3000 or be referred for civil penalty proceedings or criminal prosecution. Companies face up to \$1 million in fine."

According to World Organisation for Animal Health, African swine fever (ASF) is a severe viral disease affecting domestic and wild pigs and is responsible for serious production and economic losses.

"This transboundary animal disease (TAD) can be spread by live or dead pigs, domestic or wild, and pork products.

"Furthermore, transmission can also occur via contaminated feed and fomites (non-living objects) such as shoes, clothes, vehicles, knives, equipment etc., due to the high environmental resistance of ASF virus.

"There is no approved vaccine against ASF (unlike classical swine fever 'Hog Cholera') which is caused by a different virus)

"Historically, outbreaks have been reported in Africa and parts of Europe, South America, and the Caribbean. More recently (since 2007) the disease has been reported in multiple countries across Africa, Asia and Europe, in both domestic and wild pigs," the Organisation stated.

AN EMOTIONAL GOODBYE



"Your being here today makes you champions for your resilience and sticking to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) values.

The PS added that this is the road where all public servant have to go through with no exception.

She thanked the retirees for their service and for serving in the agriculture sector.

The Permanent Secretary also took the opportunity and thanked the service of MAL officers who were retired in the past years.

Undersecretary Technical (Act-

ing), Michael Ho'ota while sharing the same sentiments said there is nothing to quantify with the tremendous work you have done.

"Your commitment and service to the government and people of this country is countless.

"I understands that you have gone through a lot of challenges and changes during the course of your duties but you have proved to be heroes and ended the race well.

"Your work and contributions to the government especially the Ministry (MAL) will be treasured for



many years to come," Mr. Ho'ota said.

Speaking on behalf of the retirees, soft spoken Irene Nanau who could not hold back her tears expressed gratitude to the government through MAL for having them over the past years.

"No one will miss this exit door. Everyone must go through," she commented.

Ms. Irene thanked the past MAL management and the current administration under the leadership of Permanent Secretary Mrs. Franc-

es and the new HRM for all the support and advices that certain them to successfully accomplish their responsibilities.

She then encourage the new and ongoing staff to work with integrity while serving the government and the nation.

The ceremony also involved presentation of gifts of farming tools as token of appreciation and certificates of acknowledgment.

The event was witnessed by MAL PS, senior MAL post holders and staff.



STAFF SHARING THE LAST MOMENT WITH RETIREES



44 Cassava out growers, MAL and Sape farm ink deal

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) together with the Sape Farm management has further augmented their partnership with a singlehanded vision to transform cassava root crop into a recognized industry. This came after another historic feat on Friday 17 July 2020 which got 44 cassava out growers in the Guadalcanal Plains signed a partnership agreement with the Government through MAL and the Sape Farm management. The signing ceremony was held at the Sape Farm in the Guadalcanal Plains just month after a 2.7 million funding agreement was struck between MAL and Sape Farm. The MAL-Sape farm funding agreement and partnership is an initiative to support the government's Food Security Programme. Speaking at the signing, proud and excited Permanent Secretary of MAL, Ethel Tebengi Frances said, seeing the partnership grows from strength to strength is reassuring and the Ministry (MAL) has plans and vision to certain that cassava recognised as an industry of its own in the future like coconut and cocoa industry. She said that there are lots of potentials in the root crop (Cassava), but, getting the right mechanisms in place first is of priority. "MAL has a lot of interest in this new

partnership because of its plans to grow cassava as a new industry in the country and so we are committed to work in partnership with you. "Let's grow this root crop together and make it an industry of its own. There is gold in this back yard crop. "MAL visions for this industry includes cassava as rice substitute, for exports, as ingredients to animal feeds and can be further processed into flours, starch and others. "With the right attitude and support mechanisms in place, cassava can make a turnaround to the country's economy and changes a lot of lives. So let's partners to grow this crop and build our nation," the Permanent Secretary said. There were more than 70 applications forms collected by interested farmers but fortnight ago Sape Farm and MAL decided to sign the first 44 who were able to return their forms by Friday 17 July. Sape Farm and MAL expect the number of Cassava out-grower to increase. Mrs. Frances urged the 44 out growers that struck the first deal with MAL and Sape farm to commit to the partnership. PS Frances in urging said, "I know the path would be challenging but we are here to support you and ensure you achieve your goals as when you succeed this vision is realized. With whatever little resources you have, commit to it and develop this



PS, Ethel Frances (centre), Sape Farm Managing Director, Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora (far left, front row) with Out Growers, government officials, chiefs, community leaders, women, youths and children during the signing.

root crop. Let us not discourage along the way. "We are here to build a nation and we needs everyone's effort together. I know that it will be challenging, but, as long as we make a commitment we can come out successful. So please do not give up. We are here as your partners and I believe we can make it. Let's dream together and deliver together. You are our first partner in our vision develop a new industry so we are banking on you to make it work. "As a Ministry we are committed to support this root crop to be recognized as an industry. We are going to develop it together. "As long as we work together we can change more lives and this nation," Mrs. Frances emphasized. The Permanent Secretary was ex-

cited with the initiative and looking forward to working closely with Sape Farm management and the out growers and farmers around the country to grow the root crop and guarantee it recognized as an industry as MAL embarks on plans to revive the agriculture sector. Meanwhile, Sape Farm Managing Director, Dr. Paul Bosawai Popora said the signing event marks another history of establishing cassava industry around in Guadalcanal Plains and potentially through-out Solomon Islands. "We are excited to roll out our out-grower policy and we are thankful for the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock for helping us realize the need to spread our vision to the rural communities around Guadalcanal Plains.



MAL PS, Ethel Francis (centre) during the signing as MAL Deputy Secretary Technical, Michael Ho'ota looks on.

"We have seen people of their need to advance their socio-economic challenges through agriculture. We thank our Lord for his guidance and empowering hands to lead our way. We thank the National Government lead by Prime Minister Manasseh Sogovare for their support through our engagement with the ministry of Agriculture and Livestock," Dr. Popora said. Dr. Popora said Cassava is a new industry though it is regarded as one of our staple food over the years. "Cassava industry has many unknown potentials and so we gathered here to turn those potential into reality for our economic recovery and growth. As it similar to many other agricultural industries, it needs volume, quality and

consistency to make good returns through our domestic market and international markets." Two forms of out grower policies that Sape farm is embarking on as highlighted by Dr. Popora are as follows. 1. *Out grower outside the farm* - This involved people in and around Guadalcanal Plains who are committed farmers and able to run one hectare of cassava. The applicant(s) have/ have to complete the form required for "out grower outside" the farm and will be verified and signed an agreement with Sape farm and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock for support. The applicants have to show their "Purpose" and "commitment" to be able for screening and that the land

for farm must be given a consent by the landowner for cassava out grower. Sape farm management will verify the land ownership and ensure that the council of chiefs verify the applicant ownership of the land. Example of Purpose is "To build house for the family" and commitment is "clearing the proposed one hectare (ha) of cassava". Sape farm if required when the tractors at the farm are free will able to assist in ploughing, rotavating and or ridging your (their) plot. 2. *Out grower within the Farm* - This target family members who wish to manage one hectare within the 200 ha of available farm land. The family member 'Must' state their "purpose" and "commitment" in order to participate as an out grower within the farm. Example of Purpose is "To build house for the family" and commitment is "clearing the proposed one ha of cassava". Sape farm if required when the tractors at the farm are free will able to assist in ploughing, rotavating and or ridging your (their) plot. "When you registered under Sape farm out grower scheme, all cassava or potato produce will be sold to Sape farm packhouse under the out-grower scheme farm gate. The farm gate price will be determined by Sape farm management based on the export price and grading at

the packhouse. "If the out grower sold his or her cassava or potatoes produce to another buyer, Sape farm will terminate the contract and that all dues will be charged for payment. Sape farm will immediately informed the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock or relevant authorities," Dr. Popora explained. However, he said their urgent need to effectively implement the out grower is the machineries. "We need another two tractors to effectively roll out these programs. Another immediate need is the packhouse. This is the key to this industry. "The focus of this out-grower scheme is to improve livelihood and subsequently contribute to our national economy. Without the economy, we cannot live the life we dream for so farmers. Let's all work hard for this and ensuring that we will achieve our goals in the cassava industry," Dr. Popora said. MAL PS, Ethel Frances, Undersecretary Technical of MAL, Michael Ho'ota, Peter Rarahabura, Director Planning Department, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Guadalcanal Province- Daniel Besa'a, MAL senior staff, government officials, Chiefs, community leaders, women, youths, children and farmers in and around Guadalcanal Plains witnessed the event.

Sup-sup garden programme gets overwhelming support



LEFT & ON THE RIGHT: Photos of the field visit to family farms in Honiara and on the outskirts.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has received an overwhelming support and feedbacks from households in Honiara and on the outskirts regarding the Organic Backyard Garden (Sup-sup garden) program that it is implementing. This follows a joint visit from extension and research officers of MAL on Thursday 30 July; headed by the Deputy Secretary Technical, Michael Ho'ota to households the ministry has supported them with vegetable seedlings and gardening tools in June to start-off their Organic Backyard Gardens. The visit covers whole of the city (East Honiara, Central and West Honiara) and a community in the outskirts of town – Barana Community. MAL Deputy Secretary, Michael Ho'ota said the purpose of the field visit was for the implementing ministry (MAL) officers through its Extension and Research Departments to see for themselves the progress so far and to hear from the project recipients on their experiences and challenges.

"This will enable the ministry to be able to pave a way forward and re-strategies in further assistance to them (project recipients) and other farmers as we enter the second four (4) months of State of Public Emergency (SOPE)." The Deputy Secretary said that the sup-sup garden program is not a new initiative under the ministry's undertaking. It has been there for years but remain quiet for some times due to financial obstacles and due to the impact of Covid-19, the national government through MAL decided to restimulate the program to encourage households to make gardens around their houses to subsidise food costs. "And also this is align with the national government food security programme to counter the impacts of COVID-19." Speaking to MAL Media, project recipient, Hilda Mudu who residents at Mud Land, Fulisango community, East Honiara said the support she get through the donation of seedlings and tools has help her a lot with the expansion of her organic backyard garden. "This program

is helping us a lot, especially women who struggle to put food on the table every time for our families. The support I get enabled me to expand my sup-sup garden and ensure surplus is sold at the market to meet my household needs." Ms. Mudu confirmed that from the seedlings she received in June, she was able to make her first harvest for family consumption and sold the remaining at the market to meet other family needs. "I must thanked the government for this support and I called on MAL to continue with the program." Recipient, John Philip, a teacher by profession who residents at Mt. Austen while sharing the same sentiments said: "What the government through MAL is doing is very significant especially in this period where the country is impacted with Covid-19 and our food security is at threat. "I am pleased with the program because it will sustain our lives and help other families to support themselves sustain their lives as well. "I must commend the government for the initiative and I plead on the gov-

ernment through MAL to continue with the program in the future even though Covid-19 is anticipated to be over." Another project recipient, Annet Kaora from Barana community said she now stopped borrowing gardening tools from her neighbours after she received her seedlings and tools from MAL in June. "Before I used to borrow gardening tools from my neighbours but now I have stopped after I got the support from MAL. "This really help us women in the rural communities, especially those of us who rely heavily on gardening for market and for our livelihood," she said. Mrs. Kaora said government must continue with this very important program to support families sustain their living. "From the seedlings I received from MAL, I am able to make my first harvest and sold them at the market. I earned a good money from the harvest and that help me meet my family basic needs," Mrs. Kaora said with a smile. Australian Government (DFAT) in partnership with UNDP supported the program and implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.



AN EMOTIONAL GOODBYE

...as MAL bids farewell to retiree's



MAL Deputy Secretary Technical Michael Ho'ota



Retiree Irene Nanau.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) on July 3rd officially bade farewell to five (5) of its longest serving officers who were retired and discharged honorably from active service, this year 2020. The retirees include two provincial staff and three officers who stationed in Honiara serving in various divisions within MAL. They are;

- Anderson Sikapu (Senior Planning Officer-Planning Division) - Isabel
- Willy Tuita (Chief Field Officer-Extension Division) - Honiara
- Robert Houmai (Assistant Field Officer-Extension Division)-South Malaita
- Joseph Malende (Senior Field Officer-Extension Division) - Honiara
- Irene Nanau (Chief Marketing Officer-Biosecurity Division) - Honiara

The initiative to formally sendoff officers was the first of its kind as devised under the leadership of



PS MAL, Mrs. Frances hugs Irene Nanau as they share the last moment.



Three of the five retired staff cutting the farewell cake as part of MAL's appreciation to their service.

the new Permanent Secretary and her administration and the new Human Resources Manager. In a small but moving ceremony held at the MAL headquarter compound in Honiara, Permanent Secretary for the Ministry (MAL) Ethel

Tebengi Frances acknowledged the service and commitment the retiree's rendered to the Government through the Ministry (MAL) in helping every farmers throughout the nation. "We are gathered here today not

to farewell but to celebrate and thank you for the good service you have contributed to your country. "The service you have offered deserves a lot of acknowledgment, thus, we must recognized that. Meanwhile, Mrs. Frances remind-

ed them that they are just leaving active service but the nation still needs them in many aspects of agriculture development. "Retiring with self-respect is a pride that others, who were not patient enough, did not accomplish.

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A retiree receives his farming tools from Director Extension Department, Andrew Menanolu.



A retiree receives her tools from MAL PS Ethel Frances.



MAL staff who witnessed the event.

Move to revive 'Land Purchase Cooperatives'

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) has been given the green light to pursue reviving of Land Purchase Cooperatives (LPCs) throughout the country. This came after the convening of the "Land Purchase and Cooperative Society (LPCs) Consultation meeting" organised by MAL on the 14th of July 2020, with key stakeholders.

"MAL has appointed a Taskforce mandated to consult further with key stakeholders to discuss and update information and data gaps concerning the current situations of the LPCs to further advice the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock on how it can best revive the LPCs. "These LPCs are part of our agriculture sector history and described as 'Dormant Resources awaiting to stimulate agriculture development in the Solomon Islands," MAL Permanent Secretary Ethel Frances said.

Information from Land Use Division (LUD) at MAL highlighted that LPCs holds massive land area in most of the provinces, Choiseul, Western, Isabel, Central, Malaita, Guadalcanal and Makira Ulawa province but are now dormant since their glory days decades ago.

Before Solomon Islands gained its political independence on 7th July 1978, one of the main issues that the founding Legislative Assembly members of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate (BSIP) government and the British Government had to negotiate was what to do with the alienated plantation land owned by absent expatriates after independence. In particular, the alienated land holdings that were neglected and abandoned before and after the Second World War.

Key decisions on these land issues were agreed upon including the



MAL Permanent Secretary, Ethel Tebengi Frances and Peter Rarahabura, Director Planning Division (from back left) with local consultant after the signing of their consultant agreement contracts with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

following;

- That the leases on the plantation lands be reduced to 75 years instead of 99 years that most of the plantations then enjoyed. And that this should take effect on the date of Independence, 7th July 1978.

- That the abandoned plantations be returned to the identified land-owning tribes with minimal or token compensation to the expatriate company owners.

- A mechanism be developed to enable the identified land-owning tribes to compensate the expatriate owners, rehabilitate and develop the neglected plantations and eventually be granted the FTE title to the lands

The 3rd recommendations was taken up with support of loan from Development Bank of Solomon Islands (DBSI) who provided funds to members of the Corporative (LPC) to pay off the land. These Corporative took on the cocoa and coconut plantations operations as means of earning money to repay their loans and take possession of the land and

plantations.

All of the LPCs succeeded in receiving their Fixed Term Estate (FTE) titles. Some of them progressed so well that they became models of community and agricultural farming for the country since their establishments. However there is limited information available regarding their operational status to date.

Following collaborations and consultations with key partner ministries like the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, Labour and Immigration and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey, Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, key stakeholders and partners, MAL vision to pursue reviving of the LPCs was fully supported.

MAL Permanent Secretary Ethel Frances without wasting any time last week signed contracts with local consultants who were once MAL employees and assigned by MAL during their time as employees of MAL to work with the LPCs to carry out task of gathering important data, further consult stakeholders

and propose to MAL strategies or ways it can effectively revive these LPCs as model to enhanced Agriculture Development in Solomon Islands. These consultants are a wealth of experiences in these LPCs. Mrs. Frances said reviving the country's LPCs is in line with the current government policy of growing the economy, create jobs and better the lives of our people through the country.

"As a country, we know that agriculture sector has the potential to grow our economy and change the lives of our people but but have been depending on smallholder farmers who operates only on about a hectares of land or less The challenges of farmers getting large secured land to grow into large commercial farm is a huge hindrance to growing this sector and our economy"

"On top of that is dispute over land ownership because land in this country is own by tribes and very little by families," she said.

The Permanent Secretary further added that it is only fitting that we tapped into reviving the LPC's because these are large registered land that are being held under the LPC's with potential for us to introduce commercial agriculture development."

"LPCs are dormant resources that can be awakened through focused investments of resources through a Public and Private Partnership (PPP) that could revive the agriculture sector much quicker due to more effective and efficient delivery of support services that will result in better returns for resource investment in socio-economic returns against time. "We hope we can rekindle the interest of the LPC members to engage again in mass production of agriculture produce around the country," she said.

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Boost for Guadalcanal kava farmers

Meanwhile, Mr. Wotomaru said even though kava revolution continue to transpire across the country, there are farmers who continue to strive in the industry despite challenges and South Guadalcanal is no exception. He said rural farmers in the region continue to face impediments including; Lack of proper tools and processing facilities; lack of first hand technical information on agronomy and processing to ensure quality kava is produced, remoteness and cost of transportation is high and no Extension officer on site.

"Kava is a new crop to some areas in the country and a lot of farmers have used trial and error approach to reach where they are now and to appreciate the work done, I suggest there should be more support given to them.

"Now that this program is completed, I am looking forward to monitor the progress of implementation by farmers and to evaluate the success if we can reach 5 metric tons by 2023."



Mr. Wotomaru said plans to conduct similar trainings around the province is prepared. He thanked the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) through its Extension Department for its continuous support to farmers and for making the training possible through financial assistance.

Director of MAL, Extension Department Andrew Menanolu while commending Guadalcanal Province Agriculture Division for the successful training said he's department is please to support such exercise to boost farmer's capacity, especially through training and demonstrations as well as capacity improvement in financial literacy. "To achieve 'improve livelihood', farmers must be empowered to make better decisions in managing their incomes. This means the huge income received from kava sales must have significant impact to the rural community."

Mr. Andrew said his department will continue to facilitate support to provinces through their agriculture divisions to ensure such agricultural activities and trainings are effected to increase the capacity of rural farmers. "Improving farming production and boosting of agricultural economic activities to improve rural Livelihoods and food security in the country is paramount," he said.

The government through the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), Biosecurity Department has temporarily banned importation of poultry products from Australia. The ministry prompted the action following an outbreak of a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) virus detected on poultry farms in Victoria, Australia. Avian Influenza is a serious infectious viral disease of poultry. It occurs worldwide and previously known as ‘fowl plague’. The prohibition order covers ratite meat, meat products, by products, eggs, egg products, live birds/chicken. “There is no vaccine to cure the virus. So, we have to stop importing and also halt issuing of ‘Import Permit’ to companies and individuals as our first line of defence,” Biosecurity Director Francis Tsatsia said. Mr. Tsatsia said although the virus (AI) is not yet present in Solomon Islands, his department is closely

monitoring the situation and enforce the prohibition order to safe guide our local poultry population and the growing poultry industry. “Infected or contaminated imported chicken can pass the virus to Solomon Islands chicken. Therefore, we are now stepping up inspection and actively monitor all our risk pathways.” Mr. Tsatsia said Solomon Islands import most of its Chicken product from Australia therefore Australia poses more risk than other countries. “However, we do have some risk from international vessels and aircrafts.” The Director said those who breached the prohibition order would face hefty penalties. “\$3000.00 fine or five years imprisonment for individuals while companies will fine up to \$1million.” Mr. Tsatsia cautions chicken importers may import from disease free states where Australian Authority can monitor and enable to issue

Poultry products from Australia banned



certificate. According to the World Organisation for Animal Health, Avian influenza (AI) virus is primarily disease of poultry, water fowl and migratory birds caused by Type “A” influenza viruses, which can infect several species of domestic poultry, including chickens, turkeys, quail, guinea fowl and ducks, as well as caged and wild birds. “AI viruses have also been isolated, although less frequently, from mamma-

lian species, including rats, mice, weasels, ferrets, pigs, cats, tigers, dogs and horses, as well as from humans. “There are many AI virus strains, which are usually classified into two categories according to the severity of the disease in poultry: low pathogenic (LPAI) strains, which typically cause few or no clinical signs in poultry, and highly pathogenic (HPAI) strains, which can cause severe clinical signs and potentially high mortality rates among poultry,” the Organisation said.

Government gets major funding boost towards Covid-19 response

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) through the Livelihood Sector Committee (LSC) has boosted its Covid-19 preparedness and response strategy with two Technical Cooperation Programme projects - funding agreement by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nation. The first project worth USD\$499,000.00 (est. SBD\$4 million) and expected to be completed in two years while the second project valued at USD\$500,000.00 (approx. SBD\$4 million) and will be implemented within 12 months. Permanent Secretary of MAL, Ethel Frances and FAO country representative and former MAL Permanent Secretary, Jimi Saelea signed the projects funding documents on 25th August 2020. The first project focuses on “strengthening local food systems (impacted by COVID-19) by promoting climate-resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture value chains and will deal with strengthening urban and peri-urban agriculture in the country.” This is a City Region Food Systems (CRFS) project for Solomon Islands. This project is expected to be completed within two years with various stakeholders will be collaborating to implement the various activities where the ultimate beneficiaries will be institutions, urban families, farmers, fishers, food vendors, market vendors, and government participating agencies. Four key outputs under project one are as follows;



MAL PS Ethel Frances and Jimi Saelea FAO-Solomon Islands Country rep in Honiara (center) exchange handshakes after signing of the FAO funding agreement witnessed by MAL Deputy Secretary Technical (DST) and LSC Chairman Michael Ho’ota and Nichol Nonga (left) also from FAO Honiara office.

1. Will see capacities of national and local institutions strengthened to coordinate and plan for resilient and sustainable urban and peri-urban agriculture value chains for food security and nutrition. Local food systems assessed for their role in the improvement of nutrition and food security and the priority climate risks threatening the overall goal of nutrition and food security. Technical guidance, training and knowledge sharing opportunities provided to governmental institutions for a comprehensive climate-resilient city-region food systems approach to food and nutrition security.
2. Capacities of value chains actors in the selected urban and peri-urban

region strengthened on climate-resilient and sustainable agriculture and food production systems. Existing demo gardens in the urban/peri-urban area of each selected province re-enforced for training purposes. And agriculture extension workers and urban and peri-urban cooperative members trained on climate resilient and sustainable production practices for selected value chains. Selected producers trained on all relevant practices from soil preparation to post-harvest management and marketing.

3. Business and food safety capacities of stakeholders and vendors strengthened in selected food markets where technical guidance and training are provided to improve the management of existing urban/peri-urban food markets in Honiara, and technical support provided to the government “Mobile Marketing vehicle” initiative and market vendors on business manage-

ment and food safety.

4. The capacities of selected communities strengthened to adopt healthy diets and school garden schemes promoted to raise awareness on healthy, climate sensitive and sustainable diets in selected schools, and raise awareness on the preparation and consumption of safe and nutritious foods.

The second project namely “response to effects of COVID-19 crisis in Pacific Island Countries” is a sub-regional project that is direct emergency response to COVID-19 pandemic in Pacific island countries. Though regional in nature it caters for individual countries’ needs.

“The Project will support the development of evidence-based response measures for food security and nutrition and the adoption of fisheries and agriculture practices that address COVID-19 related needs in food production.”

This second project have three key outputs as follows; [Continue reading page 3](#)

Sup-sup garden initiative makes ‘impressive progress’



Hilda Mudu in her back yard sup-sup garden nursery shed at Mud Land, Fulisago, East Honiara.



Chief Field Officer of MAL, Lily Wame interviewed a woman farmer at Barana Community.

The Organic Backyard Gardening (sup-sup garden) activity that the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) is implementing has noted an amazing development. The program was part of the Preparedness and Response Plan to counter Covid-19 impact under the Livelihood Sector Committee program. “What really impressed me was the gratitude of the recipients towards the assistance they had received from MAL and that they actually planted out the seedlings and seeds in their gardens and are using the tools that were given to them. They had also stated that for them, this is the first time to have their own tools and it has tremendously assisted them in their farming activities,” Deputy Secretary Technical of MAL and Chairman for the Livelihood Sector Committee, Michael Ho’ota said. On 17 June this year - 2020, MAL distributed seedlings and gardening tools to households/farmers in Honiara and on the outskirt communities with the financial backing from the Australian Government

(DFAT) in partnership with UNDP. The initiative was purposely to encourage households to make gardens around their houses to subsidise food costs. “We have visited the project recipients on Thursday 30th July and the progress we noted was impressive,” Mr. Ho’ota said. He said that this an ongoing activity of MAL, however, with the increased funding support from the government (SIG) and donor partners - Australian Government (DFAT) and UNDP because of COVID-19, it enabled the ministry to extend and increase its activities more than during normal times. “This activity will extend beyond State of Public Emergency (SOPE) areas to all the provinces, input and funding support are currently at the procurement phase,” Mr. Ho’ota added. On planning assumption for Plan-



DST Michael Ho’ota

access to markets and impacts on the business community (formal and informal). The farms visited come under the following activities in the Livelihood Sector Planning and Response Plan.” On nursery and bulking sites establishment in the SOPE areas, Mr. Ho’ota said: “All street markets in Honiara have been closed and the Honiara Central Market is now overcrowded and social distancing could not be practised in this situation. “The planting material related ac-

ning and Response Plan of the Livelihood Sector Committee Mr. Ho’ota said: “In the event that a state of emergency is declared there may be a total lock down of Honiara. The livelihoods of the affected populations will be impacted in terms of food security, loss of income, labour and employment, access to markets and impacts on the business community (formal and informal). The farms visited come under the following activities in the Livelihood Sector Planning and Response Plan.” On nursery and bulking sites establishment in the SOPE areas, Mr. Ho’ota said: “All street markets in Honiara have been closed and the Honiara Central Market is now overcrowded and social distancing could not be practised in this situation. “The planting material related ac-



Sup-sup garden bean at a garden at Banara community.



Chief Research Officer of MAL Maria Gharuka inspecting tomato plants at a backyard garden in Honiara.

BOOST FOR GUADALCANAL KAVA FARMERS

A four-days training to enrich Guadalcanal rural kava farmers capacity and boost economic activities in the province was held from 17th – 21st August 2020.

Guadalcanal Provincial Government (GPG) through its Agriculture Division facilitated the training with funding support provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL), Extension Department under its Livelihood Development Budget.

A total of 183 kava farmers in South Guadalcanal region participated.

Held at two separated wards - Wanderer Bay, Hauvalisi ward and

Duidui, Vatupuku ward the training focused on theory, practical and demonstration activities.

Chief Field Officer for Guadalcanal Province, Joseph Wotomaru said the training was a success.

"The aim of this Kava intervention is to increase the capacity of rural farmers and to support them to increase Kava production to boost agricultural economic activities hence, improving rural Livelihoods and ensuring food security in Guadalcanal.

"This kava program was developed in 2018 to increase kava production to alleviate poverty in the region - South Guadalcanal where

the Solomon Islands Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) conducted in 2012/2013 indicated that there were 24,000 people in Guadalcanal Province living below the poverty line.

"Our target is to cover 8 wards in South Guadalcanal with 6 trainings for 40 farmers per venue," Mr. Wotomaru said.

He said besides the capacity exercise, farmers were also supported with planting materials and tools to increase their production.

"Our aim is to increase kava production from 1.2 metric tons as in 2018 to 5 metric tons by 2023."

He said with the inclusion of the re-

cent trainings - Wanderer Bay and Diuidu wards, it brings the number of trainings conducted to-date to six, including, Balo, Avuavu, Kuma and Talise with 377 farmers so far trained and 47,957 kava bottoms planted according to data collected.

Mr. Wotomaru said having seen local communities there involved heavily in kava farming is encouraging.

He thanked those participated in the trainings and urges them to utilise information shared to guarantee improvement in kava production.

■ *Continue reading page 9*



PICTURES OF THE
THEORY AND PRACTICAL
TRAINING CONDUCTED
FOR GUADALCANAL
KAVA FARMERS.



About us

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAL) is one of the government's key ministry responsible for formulating, executing, monitoring and coordinating the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) agricultural policies. It has two broad set of responsibilities and functions; one is related to policy and the other is linked to the provision of technical support and regulatory services. With the aim to manage natural resources and improve quality and quantity of production of staple and commodity crops and livestock, MAL continues to work together with government, NGO's and private sector partners in its service delivery to facilitate and support the development of commercial agriculture and livestock in Solomon Islands.

**To find out more, click
and follow the link below:**

<https://solomons.gov.sb/ministry-of-agriculture-and-livestock/>

Our Services

Ministry services include;

- Facilitate and support the development of commercial agriculture in Solomon Islands.
- Facilitate research, development and marketing of high value cash crops.
- Facilitate acquisition of Russell Islands Plantation Estates.
- Support agro-forestry in the country (SI).
- Promote oil palm development in other parts of the country.
- Facilitate and support the development of livestock industry.
- Enhance and promote sustainable agriculture development in Solomon Islands and ensure the sector contributes to economic growth, stability, food security, good health and rural development through improved rural livelihoods.
- Promote, improve and ensure leading agricultural developments in Solomon Islands are profitable and environmentally sustainable through the provision of timely and quality agricultural information, research, extension, education and regulatory services throughout the country.