

FROM THE HOT SEAT

The past six months have seen a crescendo of activity as Phase 1 moves into top gear. The Program Coordinating Committee – PHAMA’s high-level oversight body – approved 31 new activities for the 2012-13 year at its meeting in July, as proposed by the in-country Market Access Working Groups. Work on over half of these new activities is already well underway. Combined with 25 carry-over activities from last year, where work is already at various stages of implementation, this makes for an extremely full book.

I would like to welcome two new staff members to the PHAMA Team, appointed since our last regional newsletter went to press. Dr Dale Hamilton, based in Honiara, was appointed as Quarantine and Biosecurity Specialist (Western) in April and has oversight of activities in the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. Also new to the Team, Mr Andrew Sale was appointed as replacement National Market Access Coordinator for the Solomon Islands in June. Both Dale and Andrew bring a wealth of experience to their respective positions, and considerably boost our presence in the West. The results – in terms of progress being achieved – are already showing.

PHAMA was originally approved in principle by AusAID as a six-and-a-half year program. Phase 1 is due to wrap-up in June next year, and will be followed by a 4-year Phase 2 subject to an independent review to be conducted by AusAID, starting in January. This is intended to be a constructive exercise, with a clear focus on the core question of ‘how can we make



(Left) Andrew Sale, National Market Access Coordinator for the Solomon Islands (Right) Dale Hamilton, Quarantine and Biosecurity Specialist (Western)

the model even better? So, get thinking and make sure your views are heard! Key issues for AusAID will be sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency and linkage with SPC.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the central role in PHAMA’s work of Australia’s Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), and New Zealand’s Ministry of Primary Industries NZ MPI). Our core business is helping Pacific Island Countries gain and maintain access to key export markets for primary products. Obviously we can’t do this without full buy-in from importing country regulatory agencies such as DAFF and NZ MPI, and are extremely grateful for the efforts they are making on behalf of PICs. Hopefully PHAMA is also, in some small measure, making their jobs easier!

Richard Holloway, Team Leader

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

The full range of activities currently supported by PHAMA is listed on the centre page ‘lift-out’. Further detail can be found on the PHAMA website (phama.com.au). A sample of activities is highlighted below to give a ‘taste’ of what we are currently up to.



Trialing new crates for transporting taro, designed to reduce bruising

■ Helping Fiji Clean up the Taro Export Pathway

Fresh taro has long been Fiji’s most valuable horticultural export crop, with sales averaging 10,000 tons per year, worth over AUD 13 million. Historically, exports to Australia and NZ – Fiji’s two major markets – have been plagued with inter-related quality problems including damage to corms, poor cleaning, and pest infestation. This has resulted in the frequent need for fumigation, and the occasional destruction of export consignments—all of which means additional cost for exporters, reduced shelf-life, and reduced prices.

Recognising this, one of PHAMA’s current focus areas in Fiji is to help clean up the pathway. Over the past year we have been working with the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji, Department of Agriculture, and industry, to help improve export quality and hence reduce quarantine issues. These efforts have centred on the development of export quality standards and guidelines, and promotion of these to growers, packhouse operators, exporters, and quarantine/ extension staff. Guidelines have now been finalised, with additional training scheduled over the next 6 months. This work has been carried out in close



Washing taro corms ready for export

coordination with a 'sister' project funded by ACIAR, which aims to reduce damage to corms through adoption of improved packaging and handling procedures.

Results from these efforts are starting to show. Evidence is emerging of a marked reduction in pest intercepts, and improved quality, at the Australian and NZ borders. For example, in June NZ MPI reported an unprecedented 'clean' result following a 600-sample inspection. DAFF has also commented on a marked improvement.

Work is also underway on a survey to identify the range of viral diseases affecting taro that are common to Fiji and Australia. The results of the survey will be used to decide whether Fiji has a case for asking Australia to drop the requirement that taro be 'topped' prior to export, designed to prevent the transmission of viral diseases. Topping exposes taro flesh and increases the risk of postharvest rots, again affecting product quality and resulting in economic losses.

■ Pineapples Exports from Fiji to NZ

Fiji grows great pineapples (some might even say the best in the Pacific!), while NZ can't grow them at all... making a perfect recipe for trade. Even better, NZ has long had policy in place allowing the importation of pineapples from Fiji. However, the trade has been slow to develop due to lack of clarity around the specific import conditions imposed by NZ MPI, and lack of understanding at the Fiji end on how best to meet these conditions.

PHAMA has recently worked with BAF, Ministry of Agriculture and growers to seek clarification from NZ MPI concerning import conditions relating to physiological maturity at harvest (and hence fruit fly host status). This has resulted in a general simplification of conditions and has rekindled interest from Fijian producers and exporters in resuming exports. Over the last 6 months, five trial airfreight consignments have been sent out by Turners and Growers (Fiji) to test the export pathway and market reaction, with generally favourable results. The medium term objective is to increase exports to a container a month, by sea freight. Importantly, this trade would provide a production alternative for generally poorer farmers on marginal sugar cane land. PHAMA will continue to provide assistance as required to help growers understand and comply with NZ's import conditions.

(Below) Fiji pineapples being trimmed for export

(Below Right) Vanuatu meat Inspector trainees examining carcasses for disease



■ Meat Inspector Training in Vanuatu

Vanuatu's beef industry is a mainstay of the country's agricultural sector, with total export sales in 2011 of around AUD 5.2 million. On the back of good animal disease status and recognition of its export meat certification systems, it already has access to discerning markets such as Japan, Australia, and New Zealand.

Meat inspectors from the Department of Quarantine and Livestock Services (DLQS), based at export abattoirs to examine carcasses for disease and monitor hygiene standards, are an essential part of the system. With the pending retirement of several inspectors, and the need for new recruits to service an expanding industry, maintaining these services had become a pressing issue for the industry.

To help address the problem PHAMA has recently funded a 2-month 'hands on' training course. This was held at Vanuatu Abattoirs Ltd (VAL), using a specialised trainer brought in from New Zealand. Six new inspectors drawn from DLQS and VAL were trained up, and existing meat inspectors were provided with refresher training. To ensure that Vanuatu can sustain meat inspection services into the future, two DLQS staff were also provided with higher-level 'Train-the-Trainer' instruction. The qualifications gained by all trainees have been recognised by the Vanuatu National Training Council.

The end result is that Vanuatu is now in a much better position to meet requirements for maintaining export markets. There is a full team of meat inspectors in place, trained to international standards, and DLQS has the capacity to monitor competencies and train new staff into the future.





Grading and drying kava for export in Vanuatu



Towards defining export grade standards



Grading and loading sawn timber for export in the Solomons

■ **Kava Quality Manual Developed for Vanuatu**

Vanuatu has a well-developed kava industry, with exports going to Fiji, New Caledonia, US, Kiribati and China. The export of low quality kava, resulting from inappropriate and unhygienic production and processing methods, has been an ongoing problem that potentially undermines the industry.

Government officials and industry representatives identified the need to develop guidelines covering improved production, processing and handling techniques. Responding to this need, PHAMA has developed a practical, illustrated field guide for producers, processors, exporters and regulators. The guide is designed to help everyone involved in the industry understand the quality issues concerned, and to take ownership of the improvements required to ensure Vanuatu kava better meets international market requirements. The guide will be officially launched early next year, with support for training and extension activities to follow. The end result – hopefully – will be less ‘2-day’ kava and an enhanced export reputation!

■ **Towards Sustainable Forestry Certification in the Solomon Islands.**

Forest products are the largest export industry for the Solomon Islands, valued at AUD 210 million in 2011. At present, most exports are in log form, with only limited exports of sawn timber (AUD 10 million). Current levels of logging are widely recognised as being unsustainable, with revenues from log

exports predicted to decline sharply over the coming few years. Recognising this, Government policy is to increase exports of value-added sawn timber.

However, there is a problem with the plan. Many timber importing countries, including Australia and the USA, are enacting legislation requiring importers to prove that their products come from sustainably managed, and legally harvested resources. The necessary certification schemes in the Solomons are currently poorly developed, and there is a significant risk that this will hinder the desired shift from exports of unprocessed logs to value-added sawn timber. To address this, PHAMA has been asked to assess the feasibility of establishing a production certification scheme for selected forest products, designed to meet the importing requirements of countries such as Australia. It is also assessing whether sufficient trade can be established to support the implementation of the scheme.

Initial consultations have been undertaken with a range of stakeholders, including the EU-funded FACT program. PHAMA is looking to build on FACT’s implementation of forestry certification work with selected producer groups. It will also consider the bigger picture of developing options for establishing national systems for verification of legal harvesting. Early indications are that there is a good opportunity for PHAMA to support the development of these certification systems as a basis for improving market access. Final recommendations and development options are a work-in-progress. Watch this space!



Fumigation trainees from Fiji, Samoa, Vanuatu and the Solomons hard at work in Fiji, November 2012

■ **Improved Fumigation Delivery in PHAMA Countries**

Internationally, methyl bromide fumigation is widely used as a quarantine treatment for a range of pests and diseases. A large percentage of containers are fumigated due to quarantine concerns, especially relating to the control of Giant African Snail and invasive ants. In addition, a large volume of containers are fumigated on arrival in PHAMA countries due to pest and disease concerns. Skills in PHAMA countries for the safe and effective delivery of methyl bromide fumigation are highly variable. The condition of facilities and equipment is also highly variable. Prior to PHAMA, there was no certification of either staff or facilities to any standard. As a result, fumigation practices are routinely questioned by importing countries. Improving fumigation delivery is regarded as an essential part of developing sustainable market access and biosecurity strategies.

To address this situation, PHAMA has partnered with Australia's DAFF for roll-out of the Australian Fumigation Accreditation Scheme (AFAS). This scheme, implemented internationally by DAFF, aims to improve fumigation practice and develop reliable and internationally recognised accreditation, audit and review standards. Roll-out is following a cascaded approach. This involves developing a core regional Team of accredited fumigation providers in Fiji, which is generally acknowledged as having better-developed fumigation services than other PHAMA countries. The idea is that this Team will then be used to provide training, accreditation and audit services in other PHAMA countries where fumigation services are not as well developed.

The roll-out is already well advanced. The Fiji Team is established and has been comprehensively trained in fumigation delivery,

'Train the Trainer' approaches, and auditing requirements. Following this training, it has been supported to train fumigation operators from Fiji, Tonga, Samoa, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands. Of particular note, the Fiji part of the program is starting to develop its own momentum. Several additional training courses have recently been conducted by the Team in Fiji, to AFAS standards, funded entirely by Fiji Government independent of PHAMA support.

Complementing the training program, PHAMA is also assisting with the development of improved fumigation hardware where necessary. A back-up generator for the fumigation chamber in Tonga was commissioned in August; and a new chamber is on the books for Samoa. Additional assistance with hardware will be provided to other PHAMA countries as the need is identified.

■ Bee Health Survey in Samoa

In the 1980s Samoa had a sizeable honey industry with substantial exports to Germany. For a range of reasons the industry has since contracted, but is now entering a period of renewed growth. With supply poised to exceed domestic demand, there is once again interest in exporting, with a particular focus on NZ.

NZ, Australia and the EU all require evidence of Samoa's bee health status before permitting importation of bee products. PHAMA was therefore asked to help with a bee health survey. This was carried out in July, providing a generally clean 'bill of health' across a wide range of potential pests and diseases, with one notable but very important exception. A single and isolated case of American Foulbrood was detected. While this is unlikely to affect access to the NZ market, it could potentially affect access to other export markets. More importantly, if it were to become established it has the potential to destroy the industry in Samoa by reducing productivity and profitability.

Following detection, an Emergency Response Plan was immediately activated to contain and eradicate the disease. Surveillance monitoring to determine whether this has been successful is ongoing. To date, no further cases have been detected.



Examining Samoan beehives for symptoms of American Foulbrood



Inspecting 'Masterpiece' seedless watermelon in Tonga for compliance with export conditions

■ Watermelon Exports from Tonga to NZ

As reported in the last Regional Newsletter, helping improve the water melon export pathway to NZ remains a major focus of PHAMA's work in Tonga. Shipments started in late 2010, with a medium-term export target of AUD 1.35 million per year.

A comprehensive review of the pathway was completed by PHAMA in July 2011, from farm-gate to on-arrival inspection in NZ. The review identified a range of critical issues that could potentially threaten market access, including fumigation delivery, procedural documentation and record keeping, phytosanitary certification, and in-field control of target pest species. Work has continued over the past year to address these issues. Management and fumigation manuals have been updated, quarantine staff and growers trained to meet import requirements, and fumigation staff trained. Commissioning of a 110 kVa back-up generator for the Tonga post-harvest and fumigation facility was completed in August, eliminating the risk that consignments are treated incorrectly during power outages. Finally, the Water Melon Export Group, under the auspices of the Tonga MAWG, recently negotiated with Ports Authority for a designated 'fresh export-only' area at the Port, which should help to eliminate inspection failures in NZ. This will mean earlier shipment clearances and extended shelf-

life of product in NZ. PHAMA is also working with Tonga MAF to develop a systems approach based on non-host fruit fly status of watermelon and other products, as a possible longer-term alternative to mandatory fumigation.

Export volumes continue to build. Following a difficult start to the season due to adverse weather conditions, around 85 tons have been exported for the 2012 season to date. The target for the season through to Xmas is 200-250tons, laying down a solid foundation for 2013. Exporters, and importers, are pretty happy!

For any enquiries please contact the **PHAMA Program Management Office** in Suva, Fiji, landline +679 337 9345. Visit our website phama.com.au for full contact details for the Regional and Country Offices.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

REFERENCE	ACTIVITY TITLE
FIJI05	Development of and training on taro production and packhouse standards.
FIJI06	Substantiation of Australia's requirement for devitalisation of taro imports.
FIJI08	Progression of new market access requests for papaya and breadfruit to the US.
FIJI10	New market access submission/s for products recommended under Activity FIJI09.
FIJI11	Management of <i>Bactrocera kirki</i> on Rotuma Island.
FIJI13	Review and improvement of existing HTFA export pathways to NZ
FIJI14	Product development of shelf-stable vanilla paste, vanilla sugar and cinnamon sugar for human consumption
FIJI15	Honey bee health survey
FIJI16	Development of Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) Plans for key export facilities.
FIJI17	Development of operational procedures to meet quarantine requirements for ginger exports to Australia.
FIJI18	Development of a kava quality manual
FIJI19	Poultry health survey
FIJI20	Feasibility study on developing exports of selected products to PR China.
FIJI21	Improved system for managing biosecurity risks associated with horticultural seed imports
FIJI22	New market access for frozen processed vegetables into Papua New Guinea
FIJI23	Development of a biosecurity plan for the papaya industry
SAMOA06	Development of a risk management measure for mites on organic banana exports to NZ.
SAMOA09	Accreditation of copra meal and PKE export processing and handling facilities.
SAMOA10	Export of personal consignments of heat-treated breadfruit to Australia and NZ.
SAMOA11	Bee health survey
SAMOA12	Improved market access for cordyline foliage into New Zealand
SAMOA13	New market access for Meyer lemons into New Zealand
SAMOA14	New market access for pineapples into New Zealand
SAMOA15	New market access for commercial consignments of heat-treated breadfruit to Australia and NZ.
SAMOA16	Establishment of a quarantine diagnostics laboratory
SAMOA17	Establishment of a methyl bromide (MB) fumigation chamber
SAMOA18	Certification of horticultural export processing facilities to meet NZ standards
SAMOA19	Developing the capacity of SROS to undertake food safety and quality testing for export commodities
SOLS06	Development of national quality standards for the production and testing of cocoa to meet international market requirements.
SOLS08	Trial shipments of cut flowers and foliage to Australia
SOLS10	Development of 'sustainable forestry' certification for exports of value-added forest products.
SOLS11	Improved fish inspection capacity to support processed fish exports
SOLS12	Improved testing capacity to support processed fish exports
SOLS13	Feasibility study on selected exports to Australia
SOLS14	Review of the potential for developing a canarium nut export industry
TONGA04	Improvements to the watermelon export pathway to NZ and development of a systems approach to replace methyl bromide fumigation for fruit fly management.
TONGA06	Purchase of a generator as back-up power for Tonga's fumigation facility.
TONGA08	Feasibility study to determine infrastructure requirements for processing and packaging of horticultural commodities for export
TONGA09	Feasibility study on selected exports to NZ.

REFERENCE	ACTIVITY TITLE
TONGA10	HACCP accreditation for selected export facilities
TONGA11	Improved access conditions for watermelons into Samoa
TONGA12	Development of commercial packaging for fresh and frozen rootcrop exports to NZ
VAN03	Upgrading of diagnostic services to support the export of value-added products.
VAN04	Development of HACCP Plans for key export industries.
VAN05	Training of meat inspectors for beef export processing facilities.
VAN08	Development of a vanilla quality manual
VAN09	Development of a kava quality manual
VAN10	Bee health survey
VAN11	Review of veterinary capacity and systems supporting market access for beef
VAN12	Review of the potential for cut flower and foliage exports to Australia and New Zealand
VAN13	New market access for beef products to the Republic of South Korea
VAN14	Training on tamanu seed harvesting for quality tamanu oil production for export
REG01	Market access database development.
REG03	Initiation of a regional strategy for managing quarantine and market access issues.
REG04	Support for bilateral market access negotiations with key trading partners.
REG05	Review of quarantine issues surrounding trade in handicraft products.
REG06	Implementation of the Australian Fumigation and Accreditation Scheme (AFAS) for PHAMA countries.

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