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Fiji Launches National Organic Association

Fiji is taking organic farming seriously with the launch in September of the Fiji Organics Association (FOA) at the Sigatoka Valley Research Station.

Fiji's Interim Minister for Forests and Fisheries, Joketani Cokanasiga, while launching FOA encouraged farmers to take up organic farming saying it is the way forward mainly because of the environmental-friendly way of producing food and is also sustainable.

"The conventional methods of growing crops often times have a negative impact on the environment. They can also have serious side effects on the health of consumers and community at large," said Cokanasiga.

The director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Land Resources Division 'Aleki Sisifa said globally organic agriculture was not something new.

He said it dates back to when humans began to farm and many practices of modern organic agriculture were the only options

for farmers before the advent of chemically synthesized fertilisers, fossil fuel pesticides and mechanisation which allow industrial agriculture to function.

The chairman of FOA, Sant Kumar said the United States and European Union are the largest markets for organic products and this is where organic farmers should be targeting their exports.

The global organic market reached US\$25 billion in 2005 from US\$13 billion in 1998.

Kumar said FOA has about 40 members and he wants to see more farmers getting involved in organic farming.

Crops that are currently certified in Fiji are cold pressed coconut oil, spices from Spices of Fiji Limited and noni juice.

The SPC's Land Resources Division in Suva has been a constant partner in the establishment of FOA



Launching of Fiji Organic Association: Interim Minister for Forests and Fisheries, Joketani Cokanasiga (left), LRD Director 'Aleki Sisifa, and Chairman of FOA, Sant Kumar.

Helping Pacific Organic Grow

by Stephen D. Hazelman, SPC

A briefing of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) & Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Project

This project is developing a mechanism to foster collaboration between the organic players of the Pacific Island countries and other regions.

The project will facilitate the ongoing development of regional organic certification standards being developed through the IFAD/IFOAM project *Building Capacities on Certification of Organic Agriculture in the Pacific* through locally own process and will negotiate regional standard acceptance to certifying bodies in other regions.

The project will also facilitate development of Regional Strategy and national plans to lay the foundation of sustainable organic agriculture development in the Pacific Island Countries.

Why Regional Organic Standards?

- An opportunity to tell our story in the organic world
- A unique branding and marketing opportunity
- Harmonized standards will facilitate certification and reduce costs of certification
- Provide a standard that is appropriate for the unique and diverse social, cultural, environmental and agricultural situation of the Pacific Island Countries.

Pacific High Level Advisory Committee on Organic Agriculture (PHLACO)

Is the political high level body to promote organic agriculture in the Pacific region. Its members are drawn from invited Pacific Leaders who have shown keen interest in promoting organic agriculture in their respective countries.

Pacific Regional Organic Steering Committee (PROSC)

Will be set up as the political body of the organic agriculture development in the Pacific with the purpose to provide impetus and engender support for organic development at the highest levels.

Regional Organic Task Force (ROTF)

Will be the technical body for the regional organic development.

It will consist of experienced organic experts selected by each participating country. Responsibilities include:

- Engage in developing regional standards
- Drawing up Regional Organic Strategic Plan (5yr plan 2008-2012)
- Facilitate studies & survey in organic agriculture development
- Reporting & promotion of organic agriculture in the region
- Provide technical advice in development of organic sector in the region

National Organic Association/ Organic NGOs in Participating Countries

National Organic Associations have been proven as very effective bodies in organic agriculture development in other regions. The project will provide support to National Organic Associations in the area of drafting constitution, formal recognition, accreditation and awareness, development of project proposals and drawing up mechanisms to sustain the associations.



Stephen Hazelman, SPC Land Resources Division, making remarks at the launch of FOA.

Certification Progress

by Sokoveti V. Namoumou

On October 27th, 2007 I was invited to speak to a meeting of the vanilla producers in Fiji at the Agriculture Station in Lomaivuna. The group's leader—Spices of Fiji Limited—has been practicing organic vanilla farming since 1991. Mr. Ronald Getty, of Spices of Fiji Limited, is encouraging the other vanilla producers to “go organic.”

I presented information to the farmers and Agricultural Station staff about the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements, the ECOCert certification standard for organic, and the Internal Control System. Sharing the details of organic farming and certification with farmers is a vital step in building support for organic agriculture from the roots up.

This quarter I have completed three-day inspections of two producers under the ECOCert Certification Standard.

Frezzo Beverage Fiji Limited exports noni to Germany, whose application is being lodged by the importers there. Spices of Fiji Limited are exporters of vanilla, cinnamon, nutmeg, cardamom, and turmeric.

Sokoveti V. Namoumou is the only trained inspector for ECOCert in Fiji. She has been certified as an inspector since 2004 and completes inspections for ECOCert in Fiji and Vanuatu.

Namoumou was also one of the two representatives from Fiji to participate in the organic workshops in Samoa as part of the Regional Organic Task Force.



Sant Kumar discussing a point at the launch of FOA in Sigatoka (above right).

From the Constitution of the Fiji Organic Association

The objectives of the Fiji Organic Association shall be:

- To promote the development of the Fijian organic industry, including practices, processes, products and enterprises which can be certified to international organic standards.
- To provide training, information and other services and assistance to FOA members to establish and develop their certified organic farming, processing, handling, marketing and service enterprises, and in doing so seek to generate adequate revenue to financially sustain the operations and services of FOA.
- To promote the certified organic products and services of FOA members in domestic and international markets, and promote the benefits of organic farming and produce to the Fijian community at large.
- To organize certification and auditing of FOA members' organic enterprises.
- To represent the Fijian organic industry's interest and priorities to the government, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and trading partners for development assistance and marketing issues.
- On behalf of the Fijian organic industry, to review, develop, adopt measures, liaise with and make representations to Fijian and international authorities regarding

standards for organic certification and/or regulations which may impact on organic certification in Fiji, ensuring standards and regulations support rather than restrict organic industry development, and are feasible in, and relevant to conditions and practices of Fiji (including environmental management, social equality, fair trade, bio security, market access, specific products and traditional production systems, and compliance to international laws and agreements.)

- To promote the exchange of information, products and technologies with other organic farming organizations, businesses and specialists around the world for the benefit of FOA members.
- To develop and/or obtain under license or other commercial instrument, brands, trade marks, certification marks, and statements or similar product label claim or endorsement, and to enter commercial agreement with FOA members for licensed use of such marks which will enhance the entry and share of Fijian Organic produce in world markets.
- To promote and encourage gender equality, fair trade and sustainable environmental management.
- To do all such things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objectives.



The smoke from the Lautoka sugar cane mill casts a shadow over this primary school's athletics competition

Why Organic Sugar?

by Molly Rockamann, TFOP

"In the remote Yaqara Valley of Viti Levu, at the very edge of a primitive rainforest, lies a vast artesian aquifer, a huge volcanic chamber confined by the rock walls of an ancient crater.

This is the source of FIJI Water." Thus reads the web site www.fijiwater.com.

While the source of the bottled FIJI Water that Americans and citizens of other industrialized nations purchase may be pure and pristine, other bodies and pools of water in Fiji are certainly not.

Most rural communities in Fiji get their water from nearby rivers and creeks.

A study from 2002 shows the total coliform count from the spring source at Tavarau settlement to greatly exceed the acceptable levels as per the World Health Organization (WHO).

While much of the contamination is due to improper sewage treatment, agricultural practices in Fiji such as allowing fertilizer run-off and using herbicides on sugar cane fields are also major contributors to water pollution.

Revenue from sugar cane production is second only to tourism and generates between FJD \$230-240 million annually.

The industry provides income for 40,000 people, one-third of the country's population.

Paraquat, also known as Gramax-one, is the most commonly used pesticide in Fiji, used widely to control weeds on sugar cane fields.

Primarily small holder farmers use the agro-chemical, who are most vulnerable to its effects as they have the least information about its dangers and the least access to training for proper use.

Even when they do receive training, they often lack the resources to purchase protective equipment.

Paraquat is a dangerous pesticide that should be prohibited, according to WHO and the Pesticide Action Network.

It is prohibited in various Scandinavian countries, and restricted in the US, where the Environmental Protection Agency has classified it as possibly carcinogenic to humans.

With so many Fiji Islanders deriving their livelihood from sugar cane, eliminating the use of such agrochemicals would have a widespread positive effect on the health of Fiji's population and environment.

For farmers who live harvest to harvest, through, simply learning about the potential benefits for their health and for the ecosystem is not enough to ensure a transition. WE need to show them the money.

With sales of organic food booming in the US and abroad, there is growing demand for organically grown crops. Sugar cane, an essential ingredient in so many processed organic foods, is in particularly high demand.

US food manufacturers' needs have far exceeded the amount of organic sugar grown in the US alone. (In fact, there is still to date only one organic sugar cane farm in the US.

The farm imports much of its sugar from Paraguay to meet demand.) The price per ton for organic sugar is usually about double the world market price.

There is one more reason for Fiji's sugar cane industry to "go organic," perhaps the most compelling one.

The Lomé Convention is a preferential trade agreement between the European Union and African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries, ensuring a higher price for Fiji's sugar than would be garnered from the world market.

This preferential price will be terminated in 2007 in accordance with the demands of the World Trade Organization for free trade.

This will force Fiji to compete at the same level as all other sugar-producing countries in the world, and will cause the price obtained to drop dramatically to the unpredictable world market price of sugar.

Fiji's sugar industry will have to be extremely competitive to survive, and with its current level of production capacity and efficiency (and without its preferential prices), Fiji will never be a viable player in the world market for conventional sugar.

Molly Rockamann is the Founding Director of The Fiji Organic Project (TFOP). With the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji, TFOP hosted The First National Multi-Sectoral Stakeholders Meeting for Organic Sugar Production Potential in Fiji in April 2007, sponsored by SPC.

For more information, visit www.fijiorganic.org.

Organic Agriculture Workshops in Samoa

by *Rupeni Tamanikaiyaroi, Tamani Agribusiness Services*

Organic experts from seven Pacific Island countries converged on Samoa for two workshops held October 31st through November 7th. The National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia Ltd. (NASAA) and the Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI) of Samoa facilitated the first workshop, which covered training in internal control systems and certification.

The second workshop was the first meeting of the Regional Organic Task Force (ROTF), which is part of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) Project to develop a regional certification standard and strategy for organic agriculture in the Pacific Island countries and Territories. The internal control systems and certification training workshop (31/10/07 to 01/11/07) was facilitated by Kathe Purvis of the National Association for Sustainable Agriculture Australia Ltd. (NASAA) and WIBDI. The ROTF meeting (05/11/07 to 07/11/07) was facilitated by Jon Manhire of AgriBusiness Group, New Zealand, Adimaimalaga Tafuna'I, Executive Director of WIBDI, and Karen Mapusua, Associate Director of WIBDI.

The participants were Sokoveti Namoumou and Rupeni Tamanikaiyaroi from Fiji, Moses Nambo from Vanuatu, Jon Yogiyo from PNG, Teava Iro from Cook Islands, Vanessa Lolohea from Tonga, Karen Mapusua and Faleniko Aмоса from Samoa, and Ahohiva Levi from Niue.

Kathe Purvis introduced the concept of Internal Control Systems for Grower Groups. She emphasized that NASAA works with grower groups to improve the productivity of organic agriculture thus enhancing communities and the environment. In working with grower groups, she identified record keeping as a major area for improvement. Maka, a Peace Corps Volunteer working with WIBDI, talked on what can be learned from the Women in Business Internal Control System. He discussed the five different functions of WIBDI in internal control and

how to conduct site visits of organic farms and processing plants. A 113-page working-first draft of Pacific Organic Standard was reviewed by the ROTF.

The ROTF's main role is to contribute to the development of a Pacific Organic Standard that incorporates Pacific issues and conditions into IFOAM's ecological, social and economic basic standard, as well as IFAD's poverty reduction, environmental and high quality agricultural trade objectives. A second ROTF meeting is planned to be held in Rarotonga in March 2008.

The workshops were funded by the United Nations International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and sponsored by the International Federation of Organic Agricultural Movement (IFOAM) and the Secretariat of the Pacific Communities (SPC). Stephen Hazelman, SPC Coordinator of Information Communications and Extension and Brendan Hoare, IFOAM, were the main co-facilitators of the workshops.



Rupeni Tamanikaiyaroi, with the Samoan Prime Minister, who is the chairman of the country's organic organization

Rupeni Tamanikaiyaroi is the Research Officer for The Fiji Organic Project (TFOP). TFOP, which was recently featured in the magazine *Mai Life*, is a project of the Earth Islands Institute and works with stakeholders to promote sustainable agriculture in Fiji, particularly to assist a transition to organic sugar cane production.

From The President: The Fiji Organic Association

by Sant Kumar, General Manager of Nature's Way Cooperative

Organic is one of the fastest growing sectors in the global food industry, experiencing double digit growth in most development markets, compared with a 1-2% growth for conventional food products.

The New Zealand organic market, approximately NZ\$60-70 million, is growing at about 10% annually. Australia's organic market is even larger, growing from Aus\$140 million in 1996 to Aus\$300 million in 2006.

However, the United States (totaling nearly \$17 billion in 2006) and the European Union are the largest markets for organic products.

In 2003, the Integrated Pest Management committee included organic agriculture in their program, forming a task force to pursue organic agriculture.

In the same year, the Fiji Organic Association was formed. Since then our membership has grown and today we have close to 50 members, including businesses, organizations and farmers.

Fiji does not have any organic standards nor a certifying body. We have to depend on outside certifiers to do certification and it is costly.

At the moment, the two certifying bodies operating in Fiji are the Biological Farmers of Australia (BFA) and ECOCert of Europe.

There are only a handful of producers in Fiji certified by these two bodies and therefore able to export legitimately organic products to international markets; however, there are several producers that want to become certified.

The crops that are certified include coconut products, bananas, spices, noni juice, and fruit puree.

Other organically certified products being exported from the Pacific include cocoa, guava, mango, taro, coffee and beef.

Samoa is leading the organic movement in the Pacific, but other countries with certified exporters include PNG, Cook Islands,

Vanuatu, and Niue. Certified organic producers provide rural communities with access to a higher quality export market and employment opportunities.

In 2006, FOA presented a proposal for a BFA "Accredited Organic Auditor and Advisor" training to be conducted through TPAF (what does TPAF stand for?).

The government gave approval for the training, to be funded through the Asian Development Bank as an Alternative Livelihood Project.

Unfortunately it was postponed due to the political events of December 2006, but FOA hopes to re-schedule the training with support from Australia AID.

Fiji is party to Codex Alimentarius, the World Trade Organization and other international agreements, but has no specific legislation on organic standards.

The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), through the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, are helping the region to formulate a pacific regional standard, and possibly a certification body. IFOAM has recognized FOA since 2005.

The Fiji Organic Project, whose mission is to promote sustainable agriculture in Fiji, has received a US\$5,000 Global Green Grant to enable FOA's support of organic agriculture in Fiji.

Needless to say, organic agriculture in Fiji holds a lot of potential. We have planted a seed of passion, which will only grow as we focus our energies through the Fiji Organic Association.

I challenge more producers in Fiji to join FOA, as we build upon our goal of working toward poverty alleviation and an improved export trade to create a healthy environment for our children and sustainable future for all of Fiji.



Stakeholders and guests at the launching of the Fiji Organic Association in September at the Agriculture Research Station in Sigatoka

Exporters Need Government Support

by Gerhard Stemmler, CEO of Herbex Ltd

Exporters are repeatedly reminded to fulfill their duty to the economy by exporting more and higher quality products.

Agriculture is one of the main export sectors and has great potential for creating an increased level of trade for Fiji. Unfortunately there are many barriers that prevent agriculture from reaching its potential. These barriers can be overcome by changes in the economic policy and government legislation.

Our main export targets Australia and New Zealand seem to have limited capacity to take our goods or we have limited capacity to produce what they want.

Beyond our immediate neighbors, Taiwan, China, Korea, Japan and the East Coast of Siberia are in need of fresh and processed tropical fruit.

Our farmers could easily produce enough fruit and vegetable—both fresh and canned—which could go to these markets. Instead Fiji is importing more than these countries than what these countries import from us.

One barrier to accomplishing these export goals is the long distance for transportation, which is difficult to overcome for perishable produce. Therefore we need to manufacture

canned and frozen produce. Another barrier is import duty for those countries. This is something that can be alleviated or even removed. Some Pacific Island countries already enjoy preferential access to some of these countries, but Fiji does not. I think our government can certainly do something about this.

Once barriers are removed exports will happen and this will provide a much-needed boost to the economy—and a more sustainable solution than the excessive development of the stagnant tourism industry.

We disadvantage ourselves by abusing our environment, which is an asset upon which we can build to solidify the Fiji brand. A move, which will help to lift up the Fiji brand, is the adherence to a high standard of quality. Producers in Fiji have no excuse for producing yield that is of poor quality.

An important area which is often overlooked is organic farming. I am talking about CERTIFIED ORGANIC FARMING—not just the omission of some sprays and fertilizers.

I am talking about IFOAM and audited production of certified produce—on the farm as well as in the processing facilities. Few exporters are adhering to an organic production of exportable goods because of the high cost of auditing and certification.



Private stakeholders in discussions with the Interim Minister for Forests and Trees, Jokatani Cokanasiga (third from left).

Fiji has no trained certifiers for organic production, processing and HACCP. Auditors of this kind have to come from New Zealand or Australia and stay a few days for an audit.

The cost of this to a producer / exporter can exceed \$10,000 annually. If we had such trained personnel in Fiji, more organic produce would be grown; and, organic produce is proven to find markets more easily than conventionally grown produce.

In order to get this organized, I recommend the Department for Agriculture put money aside in this year's budget to train some of their officers to become auditors. The other side of the coin is to pass legislation that regulates the organic certification process to ensure quality control.

This legislation is necessary to set the rules and punish those who violate the rules. Without such legislation organic certification becomes a joke and is not worthwhile implementing. With such legislation organic produce exported from Fiji will gain credibility and value. All this does not need to wait for the next elections, the interim government has the means to work towards accomplishing these tasks.

Our company is ready to export to China, but there is a 27% import duty in China. Maybe companies like us should consider moving to Vanuatu or Samoa where preferential agreements exist and import duties are much lower or nothing at all.

Gerhard Stemmler is the CEO of Herbex Ltd., exporters of Noni and other herbal products. He can be contacted at gks@clear.net.nz.



Regional Organic Task Force left: Rupeni Tamanikaiyaroi (Fiji), Sokoveti Namoumou (Fiji), Ahohiva Levi (Niue), Moses Nambo (Vanuatu), Stephen Hazelman (SPC), Adimaimalaga Tafuna'I (WIBDI), Jon Yogiyo (PNG), Vanessa Lolohea (Tonga), Teava Iro (Cook Islands)