

PACIFIC AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY POLICY NETWORK (PAFPNet)

YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE ESSAY, NEWS, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Application Form

Applications should be accompanied by this form and addressed to Ms Miriama Kunawave, PAFPNet Secretariat, Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva to arrive no later than 22 October, 2010. Communication will be limited to winners only or those requesting the return of original materials. Applications may alternatively be submitted by Fax (No. +679 338 6326), hand delivered to the SPC Suva office or emailed to Irdhelpdesk@spc.int. Please call +679 3370733 – ext 35344 for further details.

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NEWS ARTICLE
An Inspiration To All

Ashok Kumar's (32) story is of a man who fought destiny to become a successful farmer in his community. His struggles and perseverance should act as an inspiration to all youths, particularly dropouts, that is, if one is determined to work hard, success would come to him.

Ashok Kumar was born into a poor farming community in the hills of Moto, Ba, a village about 18km from Ba town. His father owns a three-acre land from which he harvested 80 tonnes of sugarcane. The money earned from this meager tonnes of cane was barely enough to meet the needs of the family of five, Ashok (14), his younger brother Umesh (12) and his sister Sumintra (10) and the parents. He was finding it difficult to meet the educational needs of his children who were all going to school. Ashok, being the eldest, was in form 3, his younger brother Umesh was in form 1 and his sister Sumintra in class 5. To supplement the family's income, his mother washed clothes of the neighbours, earning around \$15 to \$20 a week. However, they could not still make ends meet.

To compound the problem, Ashok's father Prem was a diabetic patient, and when one of his legs was amputated, the family was devastated. Who was going to toil the land? Who was going to feed the family? The family was shattered and in desperate need of help. However, they were too proud to beg, they had their self-respect.

This was when the 14-year old Ashok made a decision which changed his life. He decided to leave school and work on his farm.

For a 14-year old boy this was not an easy task. He did not have the skill and knowledge of an adult to work on the farm, neither did he have the means. All he had were a couple of hoes, a fork and four spades. To plough the land, he had to borrow bullocks from his neighbours.

This was not easy because the neighbours had their own farm to work on. So he only managed to plough the land whenever his neighbours could lend him their bullocks. This was very inconvenient to him. However, he was determined not to let this deter him. Somehow he managed to keep his farm alive and for 3 years he farmed sugarcane. Then he realized that he was getting nowhere; he would not get out of this vicious cycle of poverty, doing things as he was doing.

It was then that he dared to make another decision, that was to use one acre from his three acres for sugarcane to plant vegetables. He felt that he could earn many times more from vegetables than he did from sugarcane.

It was hard at first. He had to wake up as early as 4:30am and be on his farm by 5am. He ended work at 6:30pm, but on days with longer sunlight, he worked till 7pm.

He planted cabbage, spinnage, eggplants, beans and pumpkins. He earned about \$100 to \$150 a week by supplying vegetables to Ba market. He took his vegetables only on Saturdays, but soon realized that he could earn more if he supplied vegetables on a daily basis. However, he had a

problem-transport. He had no transport to take his vegetables to the market, and hiring a van to transport his proceeds would cost about \$20 a day, plus some of his valuable working time. He could not afford this.

He solved this problem by talking to market vendors who lived around in the area. They agreed to buy the produce from his home. This was a convenient arrangement and Ashok increased his produce. He was now earning between \$250 to \$350 a week, and he started saving money.

Three years after leaving school, at the age of 17, Ashok had saved enough to buy a pair of bullocks. Six years after leaving school, at the age of 20, he built a three bedroom concrete house for his family. He was now earning about \$400 to \$500 a week. At the age of 21, he married a woman from a farming background. His wife, Anita came as a blessing because she was the one who suggested that they do away with sugarcane farming and engage in vegetable farming on a large scale.

At the age of 26, Ashok bought a brand new tractor and dug a bore hole.

Now, he employs three people to work on his farm and earns between \$1000 to \$2000 a week from his farm. He bought the lease off his neighbours five acre farm. He supplies vegetables all over Fiji market and hotels in his utility truck. He has sent his mother and father to visit New Zealand and Australia, and soon his father would have an artificial leg, and would be back to normal. His younger brother is a doctor and is married to a doctor. On the other hand, his sister is also married and is residing in New Zealand and working as an accountant.

From a boy who could hardly afford two square meals, Ashok now lives like a king and the only reason is hard work and determination to succeed. He did not spend his time around the yaqona bowl and indulge in idle talk. He worked on a three acre land and today boasts of a life that would be the envy of many.

Those youths with land lying idle because they are wasting their time drinking yaqona and indulging in mischief have a lot to learn from Ashok. They can make something of their lives if they are determined and persevering. In Ashok's own words, "Youths now idle away their time. They have no aim and direction. They waste their time drinking grog and being involved in anti-social activities. My advice to them is to start small and build from there- never lose hope"

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