

Coconut industry gathers for value chain workshop



Coconuts have a unique potential to sustain healthy rural livelihoods throughout the Pacific Islands and can provide a key driver for employment, incomes and growth. These were some of the key messages that emerged from the Pacific Coconut Sector Value Chain Workshop, which was held on 11–13 July 2017 in Nadi, Fiji.

The workshop was facilitated by the Pacific Community (SPC) through a partnership with

the European Union (EU): Coconut Industry Development for the Pacific (CIDP). The EU has allocated a sum of €4 million through its 10th European Development Fund to assist the growth of the Pacific coconut industry through CIDP. CIDP's main focus is strengthening the competitiveness of small producers engaged in coconut value chains across the Pacific region, through strengthened national and regional integration of related markets and intensification of production, diversification of coconut processing, and marketing.

The CIDP Pacific Coconut Sector Value Chain Workshop brought together 67 participants from 14 Pacific Island countries, as well as key representatives from the Caribbean and South Asia. The workshop was officially opened by the Ambassador of Samoa to the European Union, His Excellency Ambassador Fatumanava Pa'olelei Luturu.

The workshop heard from several leaders in the coconut sector, including Henry Gosling, founder of CoYo Yogurts, about the need for the coconut industry to 'think outside the square'. CoYo is the first company to make coconut yogurt, which is now being processed in three countries and retailed in more than 2,000 outlets around the world. Mr Gosling stressed the importance of countering the bad media about coconut food products with facts about their health benefits.

The workshop also heard about the current and emerging market status for coconut products from Jeremy Grennell, Pacific Trade and Invest, on the placement of Pacific coconut products on retail shelves in Australia; Stacy King, Nature Pacific, on meeting the market demand and how e-commerce propelled Nature Pacific onto the world stage; and Dr Andrew McGregor, consultant to CIDP, on his market report for coconut product opportunities and the requirements to meet these opportunities.

Twelve country reports were presented, covering a range of topics, including the status of the industry, constraints and challenges currently faced, key areas of support needed to grow the industry and priority areas for current or future interventions. A number of common constraints were identified through these country reports, such as the lack of replanting; the decrease in production, resulting in the increasing number of senile palm numbers; and the urgent request for research into pest management.

Participants at the workshop then heard a series of product sub-sector presentations, ranging from village scale virgin coconut oil (VCO) production to processing coconut timber veneer. These presentations highlighted a number of key opportunities and constraints related to these products.

A cocktail evening on the first night provided a great opportunity for participants to network and share information, and a Coconut Product Marketplace hosted by Aviva Farms, Sabeto, provided a unique space for the participants to relax and enjoy Fijian hospitality whilst viewing many of the coconut products that participants brought to showcase and share.

The workshop identified several areas that CIDP will address to support development of the coconut sector. They include the following training programmes:

- coconut pest and disease management;

- certification for the coconut industry – HACCP and organic;
- e-commerce for marketing of coconut products;
- technologies for improved coconut climbing and harvesting; and
- sustainable coconut production – improved varieties, cropping systems, soil management, etc.

The workshop participants agreed that value chain road maps need to be developed for:

- domestic VCO;
- small scale, high quality copra oil;
- coconut yogurt and cream freeze; and
- coconut timber veneer.

Key research needs were also identified, including:

- additional medical research to support the health benefits of coconut products and to refute adverse health claims;
- research into improved varieties to combat pests, diseases and climate change; and
- research into sustainable coconut cropping systems for the Pacific Islands.

The workshop also discussed and identified a range of investment opportunities to support coconut development opportunities in the Pacific region. They included:

- infrastructure and equipment for companies to pull products through to the coconut value chain;
- participation in trade shows;
- replanting and land rehabilitation programmes; and
- domestic and international educational/marketing campaigns on the benefits of coconuts.

The research needs and investment opportunities will be fed into the development of a regional coconut sector policy advisory document for the Pacific that will be drafted by CIDP.