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PACIFIC NEWS

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From Eriko Hibi



FAO has been working with partners to tackle food safety issues across the Pacific. In this edition, we highlight how activities have increased to prioritize improved health and nutrition in the region.

This month we also look at efforts to boost ecotourism as part of the Forest and Protected Area Management Project in Fiji.

Finally, we cover the importance of reliable statistics as being key to the development of the agricultural sector in Samoa.

We hope that this newsletter will keep you informed of the work we do in partnership with others in the region.

Eriko Hibi

FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands

FAO with local authorities and partners tackling food safety across the Pacific

By Eriko Hibi, FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands

Growing concerns in Samoa and across other Pacific Island countries about human wellbeing has led to increased attention being paid to improved food safety and nutrition. Consumers, food vendors, restaurants, universities to governments are all paying more attention to the role they can play in keeping us safe. With World Food Day (Monday, October 16) just around the corner, I thought I would draw your attention to the role my Organization, FAO has been playing to keep you and our brethren across the Pacific safe and healthy.



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In Samoa, FAO has been working with Scientific Research Organization of Samoa and the University of Queensland to reduce post-harvest losses and food safety risks in producing and marketing fruit and vegetables. Food safety risk assessments were, for example carried out on leafy green vegetables such as Bok Choy cabbage, lettuce, coriander, basil, rocket, watercress and round cabbages by doing microbiological testing for harmful bacteria such as E.coli, L. monocytogenes and Salmonella at different points from harvesting to consumer purchasing.

In the wider Pacific, FAO has contributed to strengthening food safety legislation in countries which have recently established a Food Act including the Solomon Islands, Nauru, Tonga, Kiribati, the Republic of the Marshall Islands and Federated States of Micronesia by contributing technical expertise and supporting the national consultation process for food regulations. These food regulations include registration of food premises for food hygiene certification, designation of official food inspectors, inspection of food businesses, inspection of imported food, labelling requirements on packaged food, expiry dates on food, and systems for handling food recalls and food complaints.

National food regulations should be in place for effective operation and where necessary, supported through enforcement activities to ensure that producers and food transporters and marketers comply with food safety regulations. Such measures or regulations make food hygiene responsibilities clear for food business operators.

Awareness campaigns coupled with food hygiene workshops can clarify safe food hygienic practices for operators. FAO has conducted training workshops for national food inspectors, such as Environmental Health Officers, for both domestic food business hygiene and for inspection of imported food at sea and air borders. The Organization has also worked with competent authorities responsible for food safety administration to strengthen inspection systems including the training of inspectors, provision of manuals and tools for inspection, and advise on systems for registration of food premises and monitoring and recording compliance history.

Upon request for technical assistance from countries, FAO provides a package of activities to strengthen food safety. In Tonga over the past two years, FAO has partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture to facilitate the establishment of a Food Division, and has provided legal support and facilitated nationwide consultation on the food regulations, provided technical input to the food regulations, and Food Act amendment.

Ensuring the safety of street foods

Earlier this year, in the Solomon Islands, FAO support assisted with development of guidelines for street food vendor good hygienic practice, conducting "Train the Trainer" workshops with local authority Honiara City Council Environmental Health Officers, and workshops with street food vendors. In Nauru where street food vendors and caterers are responsible for school food, FAO provided support in good hygienic practices and advice on healthy and nutritious food preparation, meals and menus by conducting workshops and providing material for vendors, community members and school students. FAO is currently developing a program to strengthen street food vendor hygiene in Kiribati.

Access to accredited food laboratories with capacity to test food composition, contaminants in food and microbiological safety of food is an area of increased concern in the Pacific. FAO is assisting the National Public Health Laboratory in the Solomon Islands gain international ISO 17025 accreditation for microbiological testing of food and water for pathogens causing foodborne illness. Supporting national agencies to conduct food safety awareness programmes which reach food business operators, community caterers, home food preparation and consumers are another area where FAO can support capacity development in the region. Food business operators may receive a more technical level of training to address good hygienic practices when this is identified as important by government agencies responsible for food hygiene.

Recognising the diversity of food safety systems in the Pacific region and that different national food safety systems are at different levels of development means "a country specific approach" to address food safety, in other words there is no "one-size fits all" solution.

The new FAO programme for Pacific Island countries over the next five years (2018-2022), following extensive consultation with the fourteen countries in the Pacific region, has identified healthy consumption of safe and nutritious food is a priority area for many governments. This new five year period is an opportunity for governments to work in partnership with FAO to develop and implement a custom made program to progress through the stages to achieve a robust food control system by strengthening identified priority components of the national food safety system.

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Nabalasere Ecotourism Forest Park launched in Fiji

The new and upgraded trail for the Nabalasere Ecotourism Forest Park was officially launched by the Minister for Forests, Honorable Osea Naiqamu on Friday 29th September.

Work on the upgrade and improvement of the forest trail is through a partnership between the Nabalasere village community and the Fiji Government, which began in 2015 and supported through funding by the Global Environment Fund under the Forest and Protected Area Management Fiji Project.



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The project's support included hiring of Mr. Mark Symons of the Department of Conservation, New Zealand in 2015 to conduct training on survey and trail alignment. The 80 trainees included Ministry of Forests Officials,

tour operators and villagers of Nabalasere. The project also supplied building materials, tools and equipment and rehired experts from the Department of Conservation, NZ in 2017 to lead the trail construction work, and the Ministry of Forests staff that continued the work to completion.

One of the key objectives of the project is to support alternative income generating initiatives that could address the welfare and needs of the communities, whilst ensuring the protection the natural forests and its ecosystems. The Nabalasere Ecotourism venture is part of the “Greater Tomaniivi” landscape that is being developed as a protected area for the conservation of its biodiversity.

The National Project Coordinator, Mr. Ilaisa Tulele, in delivering the FAO message, was excited of the prospects that the improved trail would bring to the venture in terms of increase in visitation numbers, both foreign and local, to appreciate Fiji’s natural beauty and forest environment, and the friendliness of the village communities.

Nabalasere village is located on the north-eastern aspect of mainland Viti Levu, and was one of the many villages devastated by Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston in February 2016. Work was suspended in 2016 due to the nation-wide devastation caused by the cyclone: in Nabalasere, of the total 30 houses, 25 houses, including the village community hall, was severely damaged and uninhabitable. The trail construction work recommenced in June 2017 after village life returned to normalcy. In his speech, the Minister praised the village of Nabalasere for their resilience and unity to overcome adversity and hardship encountered after the cyclone. “If such is the resolve, then I am certain that this venture will be a success”.

The Minister also stated that the Nabalasere Ecotourism venture is an example of the “green tourism” that is being promoted and as reported in the Ministry’s Strategic Development Plan (2017 – 2030). The Minister went on to challenge the partners, line ministries and donor agencies that attended the launch to “learn from the lessons that are being taught here today”. “Let us be more innovative in our planning, sincere and dedicated in our responsibilities, so that the changes that we make to the rural population, the often-marginalized members of our larger family, are life-changing, empowering and sustaining”.

The launch was witnessed by more than 500 people, including guests, government officials, conservation groups, tour operators, school children and neighboring villages.

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Statistics key to agriculture sector development

The Ministry for Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), the Samoan Bureau for Statistics (SBS) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) have been working together to improve agriculture sector information and statistics for Samoa.

The importance of up-to-date and reliable data on the agricultural sector was reiterated at the Statistics Methods Training Workshop which is being conducted at MAF this week.



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In his opening remarks the CEO of MAF, Tilafono David Hunter was grateful to FAO for providing technical assistance and encouraged staff to take advantage of the training at hand. "I would like to stress to trainees the importance of this workshop", said Tilafono. "The key take away from this workshop is the ability to collect quality data".

On behalf of FAO, Senior Fisheries and Aquaculture Officer, Francis Chopin emphasized the impact of statistics in observing trends in the agricultural sector. "By building the capacity of MAF and SBS in this area, we will see improved evidence-based policy planning and formulation by the Government of Samoa, development partners and donors and all the stakeholders in the Samoan agriculture sector", said Chopin. "Collaboration will help strengthen relationships important for collecting and adding value to relevant agriculture sector information, such as production and consumption trends to better understand food security in Samoa".

From climate change to monitoring food production, nutritional and health levels of the population, and levels of poverty; reliable statistics from the agricultural sector are essential to help the government measure and monitor progress in national development.

Similarly, accurate and timely statistics can help Samoa benchmark against other countries and international development commitments namely, the Sustainable Development Goals related to food and agriculture.

In addition to production statistics, the project also identified post-harvest loss and food risk needs in fresh eating product chains; identified the household characteristics of poor nutrition outcomes in Samoa; and build the capacity of MAF to provide stakeholders with detailed analysis of priority agriculture sector policy issues through a regular State of Agriculture and Fisheries in Samoa publication.

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