

**COMMODORE JOSAIA VOREQE BAINIMARAMA, CF (Mil), OStJ, MSD, jssc, psc**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, i-Taukei Affairs, Sugar Industry, Lands and Mineral Resources

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCHING OF THE DAIRY INDUSTRY IN THE WEST**

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­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­Yalalevu Fri. 12th April, 2013

BA 1100 Hours

**The CEO and Staff of Southern Cross Foods;**

**Distinguished Guests which includes our Farmers;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Ni sa Bula vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I’m delighted to again be in Ba – one of the most vibrant and progressive commercial centers in Fiji – and especially for this event, the opening of the first chilling center in the Western Division and handing over of cows and milk cans.

Nothing is more important to Fiji’s future than for us to become self-sufficient in food production.

This is especially so in the case of the Milk Industry, where our reliance on imports is unacceptably high.

As a nation, we consume around 77 million liters of milk annually but we produce only 10 or 11 million liters.

There is a huge shortfall which provides a fantastic opportunity for farmers and investors to make sustained livelihoods and profits from milk production.

My Government has provided various incentives to encourage investment in farming and in this instance dairy farming by way of tax breaks, reduction in tariff rates and specific funding through the Ministry of Agriculture.

However, today’s event of the opening of the first such chilling plant in the Western Division has been made possible because my Government has facilitated private sector investment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we always need to think outside the box - not be constrained unnecessarily by the practices of the past but to actively seek new ways of doing things.

We need to modernize and become efficient without losing sight of the need to provide sustained livelihood and opportunities for all.

This philosophy underpins my Government’s economic program.

Such an approach assists the poor, creates jobs and opportunities and sustained livelihoods that flow from encouraging investment through a transparent system.

Following the reform of Rewa Dairy Co-Operative Limited and which saw the name change to Fiji Dairy Limited and the separation of the processing arm from the production, which led to the formation of Fiji Dairy Co-operative Limited, Southern Cross Foods Limited following a bidding process, purchased the processing arm.

This reform, Ladies and Gentlemen, meant the end of corruption, mismanagement, outdated technology, stagnation and inefficiency. It now, amongst other things, means focused attention on milk production and animal husbandry by the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers, it means the introduction of new technology and it means the expansion of the Dairy Industry into new areas of Fiji.

 This is how we are here today. Another chilling center we understand will soon be commissioned in Yaqara.

The draft Constitution on which you had consultations here in Ba yesterday, incorporates a number of first time provisions including an extensive Bill of Rights. The proposed Bill of Rights includes a number of first time socio-economic rights. For example, the right to economic participation means that every Fijian will have the right to freely and fully participate in the *“economic life of the nation which includes the right to choose their own work, trade, occupation, profession and other means of livelihood.”*

While the expansion of the Bill of Rights will place an obligation on future elected governments to cater for these rights, my Government has already started work in this area – a manifestation of that is today. By expanding the Dairy Industry to the Western Division and providing the resources to our citizens, we are increasing their ability to participate in the economic life of our nation.

We of course want a just society, a prosperous society, a caring society, one in which all of us enjoy equal opportunity for ourselves and our children and are judged on our merits as individuals.

I take this opportunity to urge you all to make your submissions on the draft constitution. A constitution needs to be finalized very soon so we can have elections by 30 September 2014.

I wish to pay tribute today to the work of both Southern Cross Foods Limited on its collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture.

I encourage more Fijians to take advantage of this exciting collaboration. With the diverse opportunities created by this collaboration, dairy farming can provide a healthy return for those willing to invest in just a few cows, let alone a big herd.

So I’d encourage more Fijians to take up dairy farming and more Fijians to buy local milk products rather than choose the imported varieties.

By choosing Fiji Dairy Products, you buy Fijian and make your own little investment on and contribution to our economic future.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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