**AGRICULTURE**

The Ministry of Agriculture is responsible for guiding Government’s agricultural policy, which is focused

on improving food security and strengthening exports. The Ministry’s strategic direction will be guided by the Fiji 2020 Agriculture Sector Policy Agenda. This policy document will help to modernize the sector and improve its regional and international competitiveness.

The following are key highlights for the Agriculture sector in the 2015 Budget:

* The Agriculture Marketing Authority (AMA) will receive total funding of $1.9 million. AMA’s core function is to carry out marketing services to farmers in remote, rural and maritime locations.
* An allocation of $1.5 million is provided for ‘Agro-Input Subsidy’. This will cover the costs of fertilizer as well as livestock feed supplements, drugs and chemicals. In 2015, the subsidy will be available to dalo, rice, dairy and ginger farmers as well.
* A provision of $2 million is made for Land Clearing. This is a new initiative to help potential farmers clear land for cultivation. The Ministry will outsource the project to private contractors for land clearing.
* A new allocation of $800,000 is provided for Farm Mechanisation in 2015. This program will involve the purchase of new agricultural implements and machinery such as tractors and cultivators that will modernize farming processes and save time and money for farmers.
* The Rural and Outer Island Agricultural Development Program (a program that provides the necessary infrastructure to enhance food security in remote and maritime areas) will receive a sum of $1 million.
* The Ministry is provided $1.0 million for the construction and maintenance of Rural Offices and Quarters in Vunidawa, Nadarivatu, Seaqaqa, Wainigata and other rural stations. A new office and quarters will be built at Dada in Namosi and Namarai in Ra.
* Government will continue to fund the various crop extension projects in 2015 and a total sum of $5.2 million is provided for this. These include the following: Agriculture Extension Services – Crops ($500,000); Export Promotion Programme ($1,000,000); Food Security Programme $(1,000,000); Rotuma Island Development Programme ($50,000); Sigatoka Valley Development ($200,000); Rice Revitalization Program ($900,000); Coconut Development Program ($300,000); Saivou Valley Agriculture Development Program ($200,000); Nadarivatu Development Program ($150,000); Cocoa Revitalization Program ($300,000); Ginger Development Program ($500,000); Vanilla Development Program ($50,000); and Cottage Industry Development ($50,000).
* Major allocations relating to crop research include: $200,000 for continuing research into root crops, $150,000 for research into tree crops, $150,000 for research into horticulture, $150,000 for research into potatoes, $100,000 for the management of pests, and $281,000 for the development of seeds and planting materials.
* The Dairy Industry Support program (which is targeted at assisting Dairy farmers) will be provided with $850,000 for the construction of dairy sheds, purchase of milking machines, installation of boreholes and pasture improvement.
* A capital grant of $500,000 will be provided to the Fiji Cooperative Dairy Company Limited at Manoca in Nausori for infrastructure improvement.
* The Beef Multiplication Program and the Sheep Multiplication Programs are two new allocations for the livestock division which will receive funding of $400,000 and $230,000 respectively. These new programs will provide farmers the training and resources they need to start their own breeding programs for cattle and sheep. The long-term vision is to establish a number of new privately run multiplication centres in the North and West of Fiji.
* Government will continue to provide funding for the eradication and control of Brucellosis and Tuberculosis which is affecting the cattle industry. $1 million is provided for this in 2015.
* A sum of $8 million is provided for the Drainage and Flood Protection Program to dredge the Ba, Rewa and Labasa rivers and a sum of $1 million is provided for Watershed Management.
* A subsidy of $2 million will be provided to the three divisional drainage boards in the Central, Western and Northern divisions. The Boards maintain the drainage networks – also known as ‘drainage schemes’ (which includes floodgates and seawalls). In 2015, the scope of work will include improving drainage on waterlogged farms.

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**HOUSING**

The Constitution requires the State to take reasonable measures within its available resources to achieve the progressive realization of the right of every person to accessible and adequate housing. To do this, Government has adopted a holistic approach to housing that is in large part carried out by the Department of Housing. The Department of Housing is responsible for providing access to adequate, quality and affordable accommodation for all citizens and especially the low-income groups and the poor.

The major initiatives in the 2015 Budget include:

* **Public Rental Board [PRB]** - for 2015, an allocation of **$1.0 million** is set aside as PRB Subsidy to subsidize the rental and social costs for the disadvantaged tenants in all four divisions. Government will also continue to support the PRB’s Kalabu and Savusavu Development Projects. The Kalabu project is scheduled to be completed by early 2015 with a funding of **$741,344**, which will benefit **36** families. The Savusavu project is provided with a budget of **$3.3 million** for the construction of **50** rental flats and the project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015.
* **Squatter Upgrading and Resettlement Project** - **$3 million**

This will support work at the Cuvu, Caubati and Ledrusasa Squatter Settlements to be completed by 2015. **260** families will receive lease titles as a result of this project. As for Sasawira Settlement, work is scheduled to be completed in 2016, which will benefit **150** families.

* **Town Wide Informal Settlement Upgrade - $3 million**

The provision is set aside for projects to upgrade informal settlements on iTaukei land along the Suva-Nausori Corridor. These include Qauia, Wakanisila, Nadonumai, and Waidamudamu. More than 1,000 families are expected to benefit from this program upon its completion in 2017.

* **Lagilagi Housing Development Project - $2 million**

The provision will enable the completion of Phase 1 of the project and to continue work on Phase 2.

* **City Wide Squatter Upgrading Project - $350,000**

This funding is provided for the upgrade of squatter settlements in the urban and peri-urban areas that lie within the Suva-Nausori Corridor, Nadi, the Lautoka Corridor, Labasa and Savusavu. Funds will be provided to the Municipal Councils who are responsible for carrying out the development works.

* **Sustainable Rural Housing/Income Generating Project - $500,000**

This is an ongoing programme that provides both housing and support for income-generating agricultural activities. The targeted areas for 2015 will be Vanuakula, Nativi, Nakama, Nakoro and Naboutini.

* **Social Housing Policy - $500,000**

The objective of the program is to write-off housing loans for Housing Authority clients who have paid more than one and half times the principal amount, who have retired or who can prove genuine financial difficulty based on low income or medical grounds. The Department of Housing plans to carry out a review on this scheme in 2015.

* **First Home Buyers - $10 million**

The Government will continue to fund the housing grant for first home buyers to encourage home ownership. Those earning less than $50,000 will be provided a grant of $5,000 for the purchase of an existing home while $10,000 is provided for the construction of a new home.

* **Housing Assistance to Fire Victims -** **$1 million**

This provision is allocated for housing assistance to help Fijians rebuild their homes if they burn down in a fire without insurance. The program complements the initiative run by the Ministry of Social Welfare, which offers immediate relief to such victims. The assistance is available to Fijians with a household income below $20,000, who has proper leases, but no insurance.

* **Housing Assistance and Relief Trust [HART] - $500,000**

The funding is provided as a grant to cover for the maintenance of Rara HART in Labasa, Nadera HART and Rakiraki HART.

* **Rural Housing Assistance-$1.4M**

A sum of $1.4 million is allocated for the Rural Housing Assistance. The assistance is directed towards the provision of affordable, durable and cyclone resistant houses to families in Fiji’s rural areas. This involves the construction of the standard 24x16 designed house under the rural housing assistance programme. The programme operates on a one third/two third cost sharing arrangement between the applicant and Government. Under this scheme Government is responsible for the procurement of building materials and its transportation to the site.

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**Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation**

Poverty is a key challenge that Government will continue to tackle over the medium term. The 2008/2009 Household Income and Expenditure Survey report shows that the percentage of population in poverty has declined from 35 percent in 2002-2003 to 31 percent in 2008-2009. While the urban poverty rate has decreased within the same period from 28 percent to 19 percent, rural poverty has remained high at around 43 percent. To achieve desired poverty reduction outcomes, Government will continue to support existing social protection programmes such as the poverty benefit scheme, child protection programmes, social pension scheme and food voucher program.

The major initiatives funded in the 2015 Budget for social welfare and poverty alleviation programmes include:

* **$0.5 million** for the Welfare Graduation Programme. This Program is aimed at helping social welfare recipients move from “welfare to workfare.” In 2014 alone, 119 individuals are being assisted by NCSMED to set up income generating enterprises.
* Government has also allocated **$8 million** for theSocial Pension Scheme. The funding for this program has been increased from $3 million in 2014 to **$8 million** in2015. Government will reform the Social Pension Scheme to reduce the age eligibility from 70 to 68 and to increase the allowance from $30 to $50 a month. The scheme provides pensions for persons aged 68 years and over who do not have any form of income or pension, or who have never been beneficiaries of a superannuation scheme. The disabled and elderly aged 65 and above will also continue to be assisted with bus fare subsidies to ease the cost of travel.
* **$22 million** is provided forthe Poverty Benefit Scheme. In 2015, the Scheme will be reconfigured so that the food voucher component is increased from $30 to $50 a month, while the cash payment is reduced from $60 to $50 a month – an overall increase of $10 a month.
* Child Protection Allowanceis allocated **$2 million**. This allowance is for the orphanchildren cared for by family members, guardians or at Residential Homes such as Dilkusha Girls Home, Home of Hope, Lomaniau Childrens Home and St. Mana Childrens Home to name a few. It also caters for children with Disabilities. An additional **$500,000** is provided for the ***Child Protection Program***,which involves awareness programs and the implementation of the recommendations of the Convention of the Rights of the Child. This includes initiatives such as the setting up of a Child Help Line.
* A sum of **$100,000** is provided forFire Victims Relief Assistance Grant. The programmeprovides much-needed relief for Fijians who lose their homes in a fire and who do not have insurance. The grants are in the sum of $1,000 and are intended to provide immediate relief for items like food and new clothing. These grants are available to those living in settlements without lease titles. A further sum of **$1 million** is provided as housing assistance to help Fijian rebuild their homes if they burn down in a fire without insurance. The assistance is available to Fijians with a household income below $20,000, who have proper leases, but no insurance.
* **$500,000** is provided to the Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART) as a grant to cater for the construction of new HART homes at Rara HART in Labasa, Nadera HART and Rakiraki HART and the maintenance of existing ones in Narere, Valelevu, Nakasi and Vesida to name a few.
* Government has also provided **$300,000** for the Integrated National Poverty EradicationProgram; **$20 million** for the Bus Fare Assistance to school children, **$150,000** for the Bus Fare Subsidy Programme for the elderly and disabled; **$200,000** for the Education of Needy Children; **$290,000** for the Fiji National Council for Disabled Persons; and $200,000 for the National Council of Older Persons.
* Funding of **$350,000** is also provided for operating and capital grants to the various voluntary organizations that assist the Ministry of Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation in its stated mission to reduce poverty and encourage productive lifestyles.
* **$8 million** is allocated for the Free Medicine Program. This is a major new Government initiative. This will provide approved medication free to Fijians with an annual income that does not exceed $20,000.
* Government has allocated **$5.6 million** for the FEA Subsidy. The budget has increased from $3.5 million in 2014 to $5.6 million in 2015 to cater for the increase in subsidies for low income families from the current 74 kilowatts to 85 kilowatts. Based on current consumption trends, FEA has estimated that a further 9,244 customers will benefit from this initiative, in addition to the 52,772 who are already enjoying the first 75 kilowatts subsidy.
* The education assistance to tertiary students will continue in 2015. Government has allocated a sum of **$26.1** million for the Scholarship Fund. A further sum of **$42.5 million** is provided for the Tertiary Education Loan Scheme.
* **$8.4 million** is provided to the Aftercare Fund as monthly allowances, medical assistance, educational assistance and death benefits to ex-servicemen or their beneficiaries. The 2015 provision has been increased by $1.5 million when compared with 2014 and will assist the 6,361 recipients. This allocation also includes the 20 per cent increase in allowance.
* 20 per cent increase in the basic pension. This will benefit Government Pensioners, Ex-Parliamentarians, Ex-Prime Ministers and Presidents, Ex-Chief Justices and Retired Judges, and Service Pensioners.
* **$2.95 million** is provided by the Government as financial assistance package for Fiji’s Christmas Island veterans, who were exposed to nuclear radiation while serving on Operation Grapple between 1958-1960. The assistance will come in the form of a one-time payment to each veteran or their next of kin.

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**WOMEN**

The Department of Women is responsible for providing Fijian women and girls, particularly those in rural communities with the skills and education they need to participate as equal members of society. It works to provide the necessary support to enable them to bring about positive changes for themselves, for their families and for their communities.

* **Women Plan of Action - $1 million**

The Department will continue with its core women’s programme, which is the Women’s Plan of Action, focusing on the five thematic areas of i) Formal Sector Employment and Livelihood; ii) Equal participation in decision making; iii) Eliminating violence against women and children; iv) Access to basic services and v) Women and the Law.

* **Fiji Women Federation – $160,000**

The funding has been provided to Fiji Women Federation, which is a national advisory body to the Minister of Women to improve the coordination of women’s programmes around Fiji.

* **NGO Grants – $150,000**

Government has also increased funding to $150,000 as grants to non-governmental organizations that assist the Department carry out its core function of advancing the interests of women and girls around the country.

* **Fiji National Women’s Expo - $500,000**

Funding has been allocated to host the 2nd annual Fiji National Women’s Expo, which is focused on creating a platform for rural women’s groups to market their products. This follows the success of the first Expo held in August 2014.

* At the moment, Fiji still uses a patriarchal system that assumes childcare payments are not necessary because Heads of Mission are men who have wives to take care of their children while living overseas. This system has no place in the 21st century when some of Fiji’s top diplomats are women. The Ministry will urgently address this issue with a view to offering childcare allowances to any Head of Mission who requires it. A sum of **$50,000** is provided in the 2015 Budget for Crèche Allowance.

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**Youth and Sports**

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is responsible for the formulation and implementation of a range of policies and programs targeted at empowering our young people and enabling them to reach their full potential. The Ministry’s Youth Development Programs are all aimed at equipping young people with the knowledge and skills to enable them to be self sufficient and develop income-earning opportunities that are viable, sustainable and rewarding. The Ministry plays a key role in developing sporting infrastructure, both in urban and rural areas. It is also charged with creating a vibrant and highly competitive sports industry in Fiji to engender national pride and benefit the Fijian economy.

The major initiatives targeted towards the development of youth and sports in the 2015 Budget include:

* **$852,000** is allocated for the upgrading of the five main youth training centers - Nasau Youth Training Centre in Sigatoka, Yavitu Training Centre in Kadavu, Naleba Training Centre in Macuata, Naqere Training Centre in Savusavu and the National Youth Band Centre in Valelevu. This enhancement in infrastructure is targeted at improving skills training for youths in the country.
* The funding for the Youth Capacity Building Programhas been increased to **$700,000** to strengthen its Seeds of Success, Empowerment Training, Youth Feed the Nations and Multi Skills/Mobile Skills training programs.
* Government, in partnership with Non-Government YouthOrganisations, has increased the allocation for the Voluntary Organisation Youth Training Program to **$200,000** to further encourage young people to serve the larger community. In 2015, Government will use this allocation specifically to fund entrepreneurial activities among young people.
* **$800,000** is provided as a grant to fund the Fiji National Sports Commission’s (FNSC) operations. FNSC works closely with the Ministry of Youth and Sports to develop sports in Fiji.
* A sum of **$2 million** is provided, which will be administered by the FNSC, to coordinate Fiji’s participation in major international sporting tournaments to be held in 2015. These include: the Oceania Football Tournaments; the Commonwealth Youth Games; the World Netball Championship; the Rugby World Cup; the junior Rugby World Cup; the Pacific Rugby Cup; the Pacific Games; the Pacific Nations Cup; and the U20 FIFA World Cup.
* Government has also allocated **$2 million** for the engagement of international coaches; **$400,000** for hosting of international tournaments; **$200,000** for sports scholarships; **$200,000** for engagement of short term expert; and **$200,000** for sports outreach programme.
* As part of its long-term program to develop top level sporting facilities in rural areas, Governmentwill provide **$1.6 million** to continue with work on the construction of the rural sporting complex in Kadavu and Gau. In addition to that, **$200,000** is allocated for development of other 10 rural playing fields namely, Nailagobokala Primary School in Naitasiri, Navosa Central College in Nadroga, Nadroga Arya College, Labasa Sangam School, Krishna Vedic Primary School in Nausori, St. John Primary School in Wailoku, Rambisessar Chaudhary Memorial School in Sawani, Shiri Guru Nanak Khalsa Secondary School in Labasa and Visoto Primary School in Ovalau. This is to provide more opportunities for rural sporting talent to develop and to encourage more young people in rural areas to participate in sports and other kinds of organized physical activity.
* **$3 million** is allocated for the upgrade and maintenance of sports facilities across Fiji. The Fiji Sports Council will prioritise its projects based on which facilities need urgent work.