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**Prime Minister and Minister for iTaukei Affairs and Sugar Industry**

**ADDRESS AT THE NATIONAL AGRICULTURE SHOW 2019**

**Valelevu Grounds Weds. 3 July, 2019**

**NASINU 1000 Hours**

**Cabinet Ministers,**

**Permanent Secretaries,**

**Senior Government Officials,**

**Key Stakeholders,**

**Farmers,**

**School Children,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Bula Vinaka and a very good morning to you all.

I was in Nadi yesterday, where I delivered the keynote address at the Fifth Pacific Urban Forum, a regional gathering focussed on driving sustainable development in our urban regions. This meeting was only the latest major gathering we’ve held in Fiji, as our country has been playing host to a historic number of large-scale events from multilateral financial institutions, international development organisations and some of the world’s largest companies.

Hosting these meetings in Fiji brings our country wonderful opportunities. They bring jobs, they generate economic activity, and they give Fiji exposure on the world stage. As farmers, you all benefit as well. These meetings bring visitors to Fiji, meaning more mouths to feed and more demand for the produce you grow. But I’m confident those benefits can be even bigger.

Whenever I’m at these different hotels and convention facilities, I think about how much of the food on the menus is grown in Fiji and how much is imported.

I think about how we can better leverage that balance to your advantage, the advantage of our local farmers.

When hotels in Fiji pack their kitchens with imported ingredients, our economy is not only deprived of tourism dollars, our guests are deprived of a true Fijian experience.

As of this year, we currently meet 48 per cent of the fresh produce needs in our hotels with domestically grown produce, up from the 20 per cent in 2011. For farmers, making up the rest of that gap represents a seriously lucrative opportunity.

We have the quality soil and the right climate to produce fruits, vegetables and livestock in Fiji that match the quality of anything found overseas. But we need to create a more consistent and reliable supply of those goods all year round if we’re serious about putting more Fijian ingredients in Fijian hotels. We need to produce crops of the same quality at consistent pricing, every month of the year.

And building that steadier and more reliable supply of crops and livestock from Fijian farms will keep more tourism dollars in Fiji. It will mean that the hotels will buy more and more from you. And it puts more of those dollars directly in your pockets, cutting you and your families a greater share of our national prosperity.

Through our latest national Budget, our effort to improve the competitiveness of our agro-industries is becoming more informed than ever, as we’ve announced a **4.5-Million-Dollar** allocation to conduct a nation-wide agriculture census. That census will help us paint the clearest and more comprehensive picture to-date of commercial and non-commercial farms across Fiji. And as farmers, your participation in this census is critical. By supplying our census- team with detailed and accurate information, you’re helping Government take the most informed and impactful actions possible to take this sector forward.

And you’re helping yourselves, as the quality and honesty of your census contributions will directly determine the effectiveness of future Government assistance to you.

As you may have seen, we’ve expanded the popular Fijian-Made brand to cover Fijian-Organic products for the first time. Now, local organic produce can be clearly identified as grown and harvested in Fiji. It’s a marker of quality, it’s a marker of freshness and it gives consumers, including the Hotel Industry, the clarity they need to make the choice to support local farmers.

My Government is also providing targeted support to crop varieties such as rice, ginger, coconut, vanilla, cocoa, dalo, yaqona and potatoes, as well as sheep and goat meat production, all of which we’re confident will not only help meet demand among our people and within our Tourism Industry, but in markets beyond Fiji.

Owed to our concerted marketing campaigns overseas, Fijian products and produce are seeing growing demand on shelves in countries like Australia, New Zealand and the United States, and we want to put our farmers in the best possible position to seize on that market opportunity.

Thanks to the hard work you put in every day, combined with the steady and strategic support from my Government, we’re leading this Industry to record outputs. Total crop and livestock production has been steadily increasing over the past three (3) years.

What should make all of us proud, is that our achievements in this Industry come despite some of the greatest challenges Fijian farmers have ever faced. Namely, the worsening impacts of climate change.

As farmers, you’re all well familiar with the devastating realities of our changing climate.

You’ve weathered the worsening cyclones bearing down on our country, you’ve watched crops wither and die during prolonged droughts and you’ve witnessed flooding saltwater ruin arable farmland. My Government has been there for our farmers in those difficult times. We’ve given assistance to farmers whose livelihoods have nearly been destroyed in the aftermath of cyclones. We’ve given historic funding towards agriculture research into crop varieties that are more resilient, and extensive training to ensure our farming practices are adapted to changing weather patterns and other climate impacts. And we’re in the midst of a nationwide upgrading and extension of irrigation and drainage systems to protect farmland from flooding and maximise productivity.

But we aren’t limiting our efforts to adapting our farms here in Fiji. On the international stage, Fiji is on the frontlines of the global campaign to address the root cause of our changing climate by demanding decisive action on an international scale to reduce harmful carbon emissions.

In the years ahead, our support to Fijian farmers will remain unrelenting. We’ll keep fighting for global climate action to protect your livelihoods from devastating impacts. We’ll keep providing smart and targeted assistance that sets up this Industry for enduring success. And we’ll keep seeking and leveraging new opportunities to put high-quality Fijian produce in restaurants, supermarkets, hotels and on dinner tables both in Fiji and beyond our shores.

The next three (3) days of this National Agriculture Show are about helping you do what you do best: Feed our people, grow our agriculture sector and help us create a healthier and wealthier Fiji. I hope you take full advantage of this chance to learn about the opportunities in the agriculture sector.

As always, my Government stands ready to do everything we can to support this Industry, and support the critical role each of you play in growing our economy, strengthening our food security and sustaining our people’s well-being.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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