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**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 2020 AGRICULTURE POLICY**

**Novotel Fri. 1st August, 2014  
LAMI 1830 Hours**

**Distinguished Representatives of Foreign Governments and International and Regional Organisations,**

**Your Excellencies, the Ambassadors and High Commissioners, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,**

**Permanent Secretaries, Commissioners and Representatives from Government Ministries,**

**Representatives from Civil Society Organisations and the Private Sector,**

**Distinguished Guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Ni sa bula vinaka and good evening to you all.

It’s a pleasure to be here tonight to launch Fiji’s 2020 Agriculture Policy, the first of its kind in our nation’s history.

This policy lays out my Government’s 21st –century vision for Fiji’s agriculture sector, a 5 year development plan to modernise the industry and make our farmers the most competative and successful in the region.

Farming today is a highly specialised skill and farmers need the proper training and assistance in order to do the job they’re expected to do and to achieve the results they’re hoping to achieve, whether it’s a big export-driven operation employing dozens of workers, or a small rural farm supporting a single family.

Put another way, farming is a competitive, modern industry and running a farm is a business, so its essential for farmers to be commercially savvy and in-tune with the latest techniques and technology. These days, for most it takes more than just planting a few seeds or cuttings or getting a few cattle or goats to have a successful career as a farmer.

The good news is that my Government is fully invested in helping big commercial farmers and small rural farmers alike achieve this success and earn more income for themselves and their families. The 2020 policy agenda is one of the ways we are doing this. It was developed with substantial input from farmers, exporters, regulators, government officials and policy experts, including a team from the Food and Agriculture Organization at the United Nations.

It incorporates hard-learned lessons from other developing countries around the world, focuses on new technology, and offers creative incentives to our local farmers, as well as larger agro-processors, that will launch the industry into the next generation.

Naturally, one of its key focuses is on ways Fiji can attract more local and international investment in agriculture, which is essential for growth and development in the industry. Related to this, of course, is an emphasis on encouraging younger Fijians to take up farming as a profession by showing them that it can offer solid career prospects.

But perhaps, most important, is that the policy agenda establishes a long-term plan for the industry moving forward. Indeed, long-term policies are something I’ve insisted on across a broad front. I believe that responsible government means thinking ahead – 5 years, 15 years. Short-term thinking can only achieve short-term results. True progress and development comes from careful planning and an understanding of the bigger picture of national development. We want a Fiji that continues to grow and prosper for generations to come.

Take agriculture as an example. Not only does equipping farmers with the necessary tools, education and support set them up for sustained livelihoods, it also boosts our nation’s food security in the long-term.

The term *“food security”* is a technical way to say having enough crops and livestock to feed our population without relying on imports. It’s one of the biggest challenges that any country will face in the 21st century and Fiji is no exception.

My Government wants all Fijians to benefit from growing more food locally. In a country blessed with so much fertile land, there’s no reason why we can’t produce the food we need as a country here at home.

And there’s no reason that on top of that we can’t grow food for our Tourism Industry and food for export as well.

With imported food we are subject to price fluctuations in the international market. If the price of wheat goes up in Australia, we can only after it comes to Fiji. If the price of milk goes up in New Zealand, we can only control it after it comes to Fiji. If the international price for rice goes up, we can only control it after it comes to Fiji.

So whilst we have very effective price control mechanisms to ensure that ordinary Fijians don’t pay more than they have to, we still need to produce more food and milk in Fiji.

In this way, food security is not just about having control over the food we need to survive, it’s also about gaining more control over the prices we pay for it. Locally grown food is less expensive, buying it supports local families and improves our balance of payment position.

When we look at what’s happening on the ground in Fiji, I’m proud to say that we have made a great deal of progress, thanks to a number of innovative initiatives and projects underway around the country.

For example, for the first time this year, we’ve introduced a fertiliser subsidy for non-sugar farmers.

We have reduced duty on agricultural implements, machinery, as well as most other agricultural items.

We are continuing to encourage young people to become farmers and will continue to give more agricultural scholarships.

We have also seen some very positive results coming out of the Tutu Training Centre in Taveuni and the Navuso Agriculture Training School, and we are fully committed to continuing our support for these programs.

And, of course, we are continuing to invest in food security programs across the country, including those in the coconut, ginger, vanilla, rice and cottage industries.

The bottom line is that together we need to modernise the Industry and make it more productive so that it can support our farmers, feed our nation and lower the cost of living.

In simple terms, this is our vision for Fiji’s agriculture industry. Now, with the 2020 agriculture policy agenda we have a clear framework to make this vision a reality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will keep my remarks brief this evening. On a final note I would like to thank all those who had a hand in this policy. It is the product of collaboration and is better for it.

I hope you all enjoy your evening tonight. It is well-deserved. With those words, it is now my pleasure to officially launch the *Fiji 2020 Agriculture Development Sector Policy Agenda.*

Vinaka Vakalevu. Thank you.

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