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Reflecting on Agriculture in 2012

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham has paid tribute to the staff of MAL, stakeholders and partners for their joint effort in taking the agriculture sector forward in 2012.

Wickham says the past year has been a big one for the Ministry with partnerships, collaborations and plain hard work the key to enabling the Ministry to deliver on a number of fronts.

Among the highlights of 2012 was the launching of the Women in Agriculture Programme that provided support to women farmers for a wide range of initiatives from cocoa, copra, kava to flower arrangements.

Wickham says the programme reflected the scaling up of MAL's support to farmers in 2012.

The past year also saw the setting up of a new national cocoa strategy, a new indigenous fruit and nuts strategy and consultations on a cattle strategy.

"Our approach is now more strategic with better planning. It will make our work in these sub sectors easier because now we know where we are going based on our strategic plans."

In 2012 there were also major developments in oil palm with MAL supporting the survey and registration of land for potential oil palm development in Auluta and Waisisi in Malaita, while a feasibility study was carried out in Choiseul.

Wickham says this included collaboration with landowners and associations in getting groundwork done for oil palm development.

For the Quarantine Division, 2012 saw the Division build its capacity to carry out border surveillance in the Shortlands and Choiseul with the building of staff housing.

The year also ended with the Quarantine Department carrying out consultations on the draft Biosecurity Bill that will go to Cabinet in early 2013.

Once enacted and passed by Parliament the bill will modernise the Quarantine Division.

"Rice was another national project that had a big year with the setting up of a commercial rice farm at Gozoruru in Isabel. We also supported rice projects in nearly all the provinces."

A partnership with Don Bosco and funding from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization resulted in 19



MAL Minister Hon. David Tome and three Father Christmases.



MAL staff celebrate Christmas with family.



MAL PS Frank Wickham.

provincial extension officers receiving specialist training in rice cultivation and growing. The trainees will return home where they will run Farmer Field Schools and teach farmers new rice growing techniques.

MAL's cocoa programme also received a boost in 2012 with the securing of the services of cocoa expert Dr John Konam and the arrival of new superior plant materials from Papua New Guinea. The Research and Extension Divisions within MAL have also teamed up to start a tree improvement programme that is expected to deliver in the new year.

In the area of food security a National Food Security Framework was developed with the help of FAO in 2012. Wickham says the framework is being fine-tuned and will be tabled to Cabinet for endorsement and will have a major impact on how the Ministry's work in enhancing food security in Solomon Islands.

"One of the key bodies that have really helped us in delivering our work during the year is Component Two of the Rural Development Programme which funded office buildings in Lata, re-building in Tulagi and the establishment of infrastructure in Honiara."

RDP has been instrumental in helping MAL get a number of projects off the ground; a lot of what we have done this year would not have been possible without RDP's assistance.

In terms of international partnerships,

Wickham says help from AusAID, World Bank, FAO, National Agriculture Research Institute, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Adaptation Fund have been invaluable in supporting a number of key programmes in MAL.

2013 outlook

Looking ahead to 2013 Wickham says while MAL will continue with its core business and take on new initiatives one of the key areas in the Ministry's work plan is in building the capacity of staff and managing human resources through more training and recruitment

"We are prioritising the need to build capacity in the Ministry in order for us to provide the best service possible for farmers, stakeholders and the people of Solomon Islands."

In 2013 the Ministry will carry out a number of reviews, starting with a review of operations that will lead to a major restructure of MAL during the year. Wickham says this will be undertaken with the help of RDP.

One of MAL's biggest departments, the Extension Service is also expected to undergo major reform.

"We are reviewing how we do business. We want to have an Extension Service that is more demand driven and responsive to the needs of farmers."

The National Rice Project will also be reviewed with the Ministry evaluating the programme's return on investment and reviewing how resources can be better utilised.

Wickham says 2013 will see more focus on food security as the Ministry scales up its work with the promotion of root crops for farmers and work on better access to markets.

Linked to this will be work on food processing and storage. This will be carried out through its MAL's partnerships in two major projects, SWOK and the Pacific Adaptation to Climate Change project.

"The processing and storage of root crops have the potential to be used during times of hardship or as a disaster relief option during extreme

weather."

This will be supplemented by the Ministry increasing its activities and developing farming systems for areas vulnerable to climate change.

Under MAL's Corporate Services the Ministry will be looking to strengthen its procurement and financial management through a dedicated accounting package to better monitor expenditure.

The strengthening of the Research Department is also on the cards for 2013, with consultations expected to start soon on a development strategy. Wickham says Research is a vital part of the Ministry's functions and its capacity needs to be strengthened in the areas of human resource capacity and infrastructure.

"We also want to increase our farm trials and demonstrations so Research work more closely with farmers; especially more involved with farm trials for areas that are experiencing extreme weather systems."

One major area for the Ministry will be reviewing and evaluating is the cocoa and coconut programme that is rolled out in constituencies by Members of Parliament.

"We want to have a more focused, and impact-oriented programme for coconut and cocoa development. We want to have a better approach that delivers results on the ground."

Preliminary results from most constituencies have shown that the scheme is not effective.

"With coconuts we want to look at value added processes such as virgin coconut oil and replanting.

With cocoa the thrust this year is on improving productivity per tree. We want to implement applied research work and encourage good planting materials.

"We want to improve yields by distributing good planting materials – improve yield per area."

The National Cattle Project will continue in 2013 with work underway to prepare Malaita for cattle. ●

Three provinces free of Cocoa Pod Borer and Giant African Snails

The Solomon Islands Agriculture Quarantine Service say no Cocoa Pod Borers or Giant African Snails were detected in recent surveillance activities on Malaita, Isabel and Makira.

Chief Quarantine Officer (Technical) Crispus Fanai says the three provinces were monitored as part of Quarantine's ongoing pest surveillance around the country.

Fanai says the surveillance focused on Cocoa Pod Borer in cocoa growing areas while Quarantine officers were also on the look out for the presence of other pests such as Giant African Snails.

The surveillance took place over a one-week period in late 2012 in key cocoa growing areas around Auki, Buala and Kirakira.

"We began setting up traps for Cocoa Pod Borer as soon as we arrived in the provinces. The traps were set up over a wide as possible area, that we could cover by road and within the time available to us."

Once the traps were set, time was given for the Cocoa Pod Borer moth to be attracted to the pheromones before the traps were collected towards the end of the week.

"The traps were collected from the various sites and then we brought them back to where we stayed for identification and recording.

"The procedure is that specimens



Quarantine staff set up Cocoa Pod Borer traps in the provinces.

of interest found in the field were brought back to Honiara for further examination under a microscope. Any suspicious specimens would then be sent to Australia for further testing."

Throughout their surveillance, Fanai says no Cocoa Pod Borer was detected. Samples were photographed and stored for Quarantine's records.

Fanai says traps were left in the field so that it could be monitored for up to a month.

As part of their surveillance work Quarantine also carried awareness campaigns to teach villagers to recognise Cocoa Pod Borer and Giant African Snails.

For Jean Eroaraha this included visiting all the villages in the Arosi 1 and Central Makira area.

"The main thing we did during the detection survey was awareness.

As we went from village to village, regardless of how many were present we distributed posters and pamphlets with vital information about Giant African Snails and Cocoa Pod Borer."

Schools were also targeted with teachers encouraged to put up posters and information material about pests.

She said it was important that villagers would be able to recognise the pests and alert the Quarantine authorities.

She said people in the Arosi area were aware of Giant African Snails and its association with logging as a result of an outbreak in 2011 which was dealt with by Quarantine. As for Cocoa Pod Borer, there was less knowledge.

So far in the Solomon Islands, Cocoa Pod Borer has only been detected in the Shortlands. Although it has not caused damage to cocoa plantations there, its continued presence is a threat to the country's multi-million dollar cocoa industry.

The cocoa pod borer moth destroys cocoa pods by leaving its eggs in unripe pods at night. After seven days the eggs hatch and the larvae eats out the cocoa pod from the inside. It will stay in the cocoa pod for up to 14 to 18 days.

The larvae's presence forces the fruit to ripen quickly and the pod to rot.

Cocoa is the country's third largest commodities earner. ●



No Cocoa Pod Borer moths were detected in surveillance in three provinces.

Grafting, landscaping and organic farming: John Oimae



John Oimae at work.

A mango tree that produces fruit all year round, a rose bush or a hibiscus plant with different coloured flowers or even bush limes and mandarin fruits growing on one tree. All this says John Oimae is possible thanks to the power of grafting.

Oimae a long time Dodo Creek soil specialist is an avid fan of grafting. Today he runs his own landscaping business in Honiara, growing plants in his own nursery for landscaping jobs around the capital.

Among his clients are the Central Bank, Kitano Mendana Hotel, the National Parliament and now MAL.

Grafting is only done on request due to a shortage of poly bags in the country, but the topic still brings joy to Oimae, who spoke to Agrikalsa Nius of the endless possibilities that grafting offers.

"For farmers who want to harvest mangos I can give them trees that season throughout the year and ones

that are short, and easy to harvest."

While grafting is something he does for fun, much of his professional life has been dedicated to soils having spent over 15 years in the Ministry's Research Division, classifying soils across Solomon Islands.

"I've travelled across the country drilling and taking samples of all the different land types. All that information I still have right here in my head."

It's this strong knowledge about the state of soils across the country that has made Oimae a strong advocate of organic farming.

He says organic farming is the best way of overcoming soil degeneration that is common in his home village in Kwara'ae and surrounding areas.

"We did a survey of these areas and found that only 14 per cent top soil is left, while in the interior of Malaita there is 39 per cent. This is simply because of over cultivation through the generations has depleted the soil of essential nutrients."

He says making the change to organic farming is the best way to counter poor quality soil and bring fertility back.

"When it comes to soil fertility we can't waste anymore time. We have to care for our soil. Where will we feed our people? Our future is in agriculture."

Organic farming says Oimae is quite simple – using anything that rots to

enrich soil quality, from kitchen scraps such as kumara peel to vegetable scraps and leaves from trees.

All this is packed into a box, where it rots and is broken down into compost. It's essential that you can see worms eating through the compost as they are the ones that bring nitrogen into the soil, adds Oimae.

"Plants need nitrogen, without it they can't grow properly or more importantly produce fruits."

The results from organic farming are now starting to show in Malaita with Oimae pointing to the success of farmers in the Dala area, where taro has returned after more than a generation.

"The taro taste even better than the ones grown inland, this shows what organic farming can do."

"I also believe in organic because of the quality of the food. When you go inside the stores the food is all chemicals. Even the chickens are full of chemicals. Organic is all natural."

He says the health benefits of organic farming offer a potential marketing tool for farmers.

Oimae is adamant that people especially the expat community are willing to pay more for quality organic produce.

"Organic means no chemicals; if you grow an organic garden and you label it as organic it means it's pure." ●



Grafting of cocoa trees can benefit farmers.



Oimae says grafting provides new potential for farmers.

Provinces have their say on new Biosecurity Bill

The Solomon Islands Agriculture and Quarantine Service has completed provincial consultations in Malaita, Makira and Isabel on the new Biosecurity Bill.

Chief Quarantine Officer (Technical) Crispus Fanai says the provincial consultations were important for stakeholders in the province to be aware of the proposed changes to the Quarantine law. The consultations also provided an opportunity for SIAQS to get feedback from communities, which will be provided to the Attorney General's Chambers.

Fanai says a series of one-day consultations were held in Auki, Kirakira and Buala.

"With the help of our provincial officers we selected the best day in the week for the meetings. We invited farmers, leaders from churches, community groups, provincial government."

Copies of the bill were shared and Quarantine staff briefed the public about the content of the bill and the big changes that would come out from the proposed legislation.

The new Biosecurity Bill is aimed at boosting the powers of the Agriculture and Quarantine Service to fight the entry of plant and animal pests in the country.

Under the new bill, the Quarantine Service will become the new Biosecurity Service.

"For many communities it was the first time for them to encounter Quarantine officers. Only those in Temotu and the Shortlands near the border checkpoints are familiar with our work. So the consultations were a good way to build up awareness of our work."

The same sentiments were shared by Jean Eroaraha who carried out awareness work on the Biosecurity Bill in Makira. For her the community's level of understanding of Quarantine's role was limited because of the organisation's



Biosecurity Bill consultations take place in Makira.

lack of engagement in communities away from the country's border points.

She said most people assumed that Quarantine is part of Customs.

The proposed bill will give more powers to Quarantine to monitor imports and exports, as well giving the organisation more teeth to enforce laws through heftier penalty fees for lawbreakers.

Among the increases include the boosting of fines for individuals from \$30 to over \$3,000 and the increasing corporate fines from \$3,000 and three months imprisonment to \$2.5 million and five years in jail.

One of the significant changes under the draft bill is that it gives powers to Quarantine's provincial offices to impose control measures on the outbreak of pests and diseases throughout Solomon Islands.

"Currently everything is centred at the headquarters, any outbreak in the provinces and staff from headquarters must go and control. With this bill, the Director can recommend for the provincial government to launch their own surveillance and monitoring as well as the eradication of any pests and diseases," the Director Quarantine Francis Tsatsia told *Agrikalsa Nius*. ●

Business houses join Biosecurity Bill consultations



Quarantine officers at work alongside Customs colleagues.

Members of the Chamber of Commerce, business houses, exporters, importers and stakeholders have taken part in consultations on the new Biosecurity Bill.

The bill, which aims to modernise the Solomon Islands Agriculture Quarantine Service to fight the incursion of pests and diseases in the country, was presented to the business community at Fairyland Restaurant on December 20.

"Given the nature of developments in modern trade the current Quarantine Act has become obsolete.

"We want a bill with strong powers that at the same time will facilitate trade and be a good tool for trade and other related interactions," said the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham.

Businesses were briefed on the main differences between current Quarantine law and the new bill.

Quarantine Director Francis Tsatsia says while current laws were about dealing with threats after they occurred, the new law focused on managing risks before it arrived on our shores.

While the business community gave their support for the new bill, concerns were raised over the Quarantine's capacity to fulfil its obligations under the new bill.

Tsatsia says the new legislation would simplify how Quarantine operates, with its functions based on one single law rather than the five separate pieces of legislation that its powers are currently based on.

He says Quarantine will become even more transparent and accountable under the new system, with a closer

collaboration with stakeholders and partners.

Under the new bill Quarantine will have the power to issue on-the-spot fines when regulations are breached. This has been accompanied by a major increase in penalties, the highest at \$1.2 million.

Tsatsia says the fines will help cut down on Quarantine's reliance on the court system and cut down on the major backlog it faces for those breaching Quarantine laws.

Among the proposed developments include a name change for the organisation to the Solomon Islands Biosecurity Service.

Wickham said the consultations were part of the journey in taking the bill to Parliament and he anticipated that the bill would be presented to Cabinet during the year. ●

Improving livelihoods of Solomon Islands fisher-farmers

Most rural people in the Solomon Islands are fishers and farmers, meaning they rely on aquatic agricultural systems (the land and sea or freshwater) for their daily survival. Nevertheless, increasing population pressure is causing farmers to reduce the fallow time of their gardens, leading to less nutritious food crops and reduced productivity, while destructive fishing methods are becoming the technique of choice as fish, the primary source of protein, become scarce.

The situation of aquatic-agricultural system dependent people is the focus of a new program in Solomon Islands led by WorldFish. As an international research organisation and a member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR); WorldFish is leading the CGIAR research programme on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) that it is rolling out in five countries (Solomon Islands, Bangladesh, Zambia, Cambodia and Philippines). The AAS Program aims to bring to bear the strengths of CGIAR centres with the strengths of partner organisations and communities to improve the well-being of aquatic agricultural system-dependent peoples.

To date in Solomon Islands, WorldFish has worked only on coastal fisheries management and on researching alternative marine livelihood and aquaculture opportunities; the AAS Program signals a changed approach whereby the broader livelihood make-up of rural people will be taken account when planning action research with community partners. To this end agricultural partners will be critical and a new partnership is being developed with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to augment the existing WorldFish partnership with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources.

In Solomon Islands the AAS Program is rolling out progressively in two 'hubs' in 2012-2014: the Central hub (Malaita), and the Western Hub (initially Western Province). In 2012, the Program has been consulting and developing a work plan of activities for the Malaita hub with national and provincial government agencies and other stakeholders



Workshop participants for the Malaita hub of the AAS.

including community leaders and fisher farmers; a step that Juan Ceballos-Muller from the International Centre for Development Orientated Research in Agriculture says indicates a better approach to aid: "If you have been part of the process and also understand what is happening then you are better prepared to do it. Local people need to become the change".

Country leader of the AAS program Dr Anne-Maree Schwarz believes that working directly with communities to help them become the change and drive change is something that the WorldFish Solomon Islands team feels strongly about: "Communities have expressed a desire for agricultural and fisheries research to involve the community members as co-researchers and to use strength based approaches to, in the words of a stakeholder, 'wake the sleeping giant'".

For Patrick Taloboe, Director of the Malaita Chazon Development Authority, the main thing is that partners have the same aims as the provincial leaders who want to see Malaita become an economic powerhouse that provides income and health to all. ●

Thirty years of agriculture partnership and counting

In 2013 the Taiwanese Technical Mission will mark its 30th year in the country and its three decades of partnership with the Solomon Islands Government.

In 30 years the mission has been at the frontline of agriculture development, working hand in hand with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Government to develop its agriculture programme.

"As we don't have a big number of staff we work closely with MAL's extension officers to carry out work in the communities," says the Chief of the Mission, Douglas Moh.

With a wide range of projects lined up for 2013 and beyond, the Mission's Chief says the overall focus will be on building the capacity of rural communities to become better farmers and to be more self-sufficient.

"Before 2011 the Mission's work had been about carrying out demonstrations in communities, now it's about working with MAL to give communities the skills needed to develop new agriculture models."

The Mission is best known for its success in rice farming, with farmers in nine provinces now growing rice under the National Rice Development Plan, as part of the government's efforts to boost local rice production, to eventually meet consumption level.

"With rice farming, I'm happy at how we have helped MAL. Now local farmers have their own rice models to follow."

One of the major initiatives that the Mission is working on is a horticulture project to produce better quality fruit trees for farmers. The project is targeting commercial pawpaw (papaya), dragonfruit (pitaya) and guava. Already the Mission is developing its own fruit tree gardens with the aim of getting the plants out to farmers and on the markets by 2015.

"These fruits are much bigger than the local variety, they are good quality and have high vitamin content and a good commercial value," says the Mission's Chief.

Linked to this are plans for the Mission to work closely with MAL to develop a horticulture cooperative or association to

help farmers in accessing plant materials, marketing and to schedule their plantings to ensure there is a steady supply of fruits that reach the market.

According to the Mission head this will ensure that there is a good supply and quality of fruits available to the public within several years.

Also targeted for wide production by 2015 is the introduction of sweet corn and sweet melon.

The two vegetables are being grown at the technical farm and will be distributed to farmers for market production.

Livestock is another area where the mission has been working on but has not yet been able to meet the demand for good quality piglets.

"Our aim is to improve the stock of pigs in the country by breeding good performance pigs for farmers. This year we supplied 1,200 piglets but that was still not enough. We still have a long waiting list."

As a result of the demand the Mission is encouraging communities to have their own breeding programme and develop their own propagating farms to supply farmers.

Also in the area of livestock the Mission has been working on developing pig feed from local materials. This is in response to a major area of concern by local farmers who rely on expensive overseas feed.

Moh says this function will soon be handed over to MAL for distribution to farmers across the country.

The other area that he says has potential for further development is the Mission's work on developing biogas from pig waste.

"We've designed a system using 10 or 20 pigs to set up our own low-cost biogas facility. Ten pigs can supply one hour of cooking gas, while 20 pigs can supply two hours for cooking.

"Although its still too expensive to set up in every farm. The benefits of biogas are obvious from the reduction in pig manure, pollution, the savings on gas and of course money." ●



The Mission has been working on new varieties of vegetables.



The new variety of papaya on trial at the Mission farm.

Local rice experts

The Government's aim to develop rice production to meet local consumption has been given a major boost with 19 provincial agriculture extension officers completing a four-month long intensive rice growing training programme.

Supported by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the officers from eight provinces learnt modern rice growing techniques, and methods of teaching these systems to farmers in their areas.

"Solomon Islands has the right type of soil, the right type of climate and the right amount of sunshine to grow rice. But what has always been lacking has been the technical knowledge. Now you have your own rice experts," said Bangladeshi consultant and master trainer Dr Quazi Hossain.

He challenged the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock to make use of its new experts who now have the skills to develop the rice industry in their respective provinces.

The government's policy is to develop 3000 hectares of rice between 2011 and 2014.

So far 614 hectares have been planted. Out of this 1.196 million tonnes of rice have been produced with a value close to \$12 million.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham told trainers that the challenge is now at their feet.

"Where do we go from here? With the increasing food prices and the big demand for imported rice, how do we take rice production to another level?"

"I would like to see performance targets set next year. Each of you will put to practice and make successful whatever rice targets you have for next year."

Wickham said he was looking forward to working with the rice experts who through their new skills could mobilise and organise farmers on the ground.

"Let's have 2013 be a good year for rice. There have been



Demonstrating new techniques for cultivating rice.

lots of questions in Parliament on whether the Government investment in rice is going to pay off. I'm looking at the experts who can answer that question," Wickham told participants.

He reminded trainers that rice projects must not only produce tonnes of rice but the projects must be profitable and viable for them to be successful in the rural areas.

The four month long training began with land preparation, planting and ended in harvesting.

Dr Hossain says the participants now have the skills to set up Farmer Field Schools in the provinces to teach rural farmers how to grow rice.

The trainees marked the closing with a field day where they demonstrated their training outcomes through displays on integrated crop management, rice cultivation and aspects of sustainable rice growing. ●



Trainees demonstrate their knowledge through a field day.



Officials and participants of the ICM training and field day.

New Year's Greetings

To the staff of MAL, the public and the people of Solomon Islands and agriculture stakeholders.
Thank you for your support and cooperation.
2013 will be a big year for agriculture in the country with the Ministry pushing ahead with its policy development goals in the New Year.
I urge all staff to continue to work hard and to strive to deliver the best service to the people of this country.
Agriculture is the backbone of this country and we will do our best to take Solomon Islands forward.
Yours sincerely,
David Tome, Minister of MAL

From PS of MAL,
Tagio Tumas for 2012 and best wishes for 2013!
2012 has been an exciting and big year for the Ministry as we work towards boosting the agriculture sector in the country.
With the help of our partners, and stakeholders we in the Ministry are looking forward to making 2013 an even bigger year for agriculture.
This year we plan to make major inroads in our various national projects, food security and taking agriculture to a new level.
Best wishes,
Frank Wickham, PS MAL

From the Director of Extension Services to all stakeholders.
Thank you for all the support you have rendered in 2012 towards the implementation of extension led activities.
Looking forward to increased cooperation in 2013 as we strive to develop the nation through agriculture in the rural areas.
Tagio Tumas,
Michael Ho'ota, Director of Extension

From the Quarantine Division,
Thank you to all stakeholders and MAL staff members for the support as we move towards a period of transition in the Quarantine Service.
2013 will be a big year for our Division and we thank you for the continued support.
Thank you,
Francis Tsatsia, Director of Quarantine

To MAL staff and stakeholders,
Thank you for your support in 2012 and wishing you all the best in the New Year.
2013 will be a big year for Livestock as we work to boost the cattle and livestock sector in the Solomon Islands.
Tagio Tumas,
Barney Keqa, Director of Livestock

To all agriculture stakeholders,
The staff of the Research Division thank our colleagues in MAL, the Minister, the Permanent Secretary and all stakeholders for your support during 2012.
Looking forward to a successful 2013.
Thank you,
Helen Tsatsia, Acting Director of Research

Agrikalsa Nius: a look back at 2012

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Agrikalsa Nius

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Word from the Minister

promoting agriculture in the Solomon Islands. Agrikalsa Nius will highlight the latest industry news, the work of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, its staff, its divisions, policy plans and initiatives.

Most importantly Agrikalsa Nius will highlight the successes of farmers, growers and the stakeholders throughout the country.

For those outside the sector, this newsletter will be an introduction to the world of agriculture and the important role it plays in national development.

As the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock I am excited and pleased to welcome you to this monthly issue of Agrikalsa Nius.

Agrikalsa Nius is the Ministry's newsletter aimed foremost at

Plotting a Cocoa Revolution

As the global demand for cocoa continues to grow the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is planning a major revolution in the cocoa sector, to double the current levels of cocoa output by 2014, and to triple by 2017. Cocoa is Solomon Islands' third biggest commodities export behind logging and oil palm. It generates around \$120million to \$150million per year for the Solomon Islands.

According to cocoa expert Dr John Konum, Solomon Islands is barely scratching the surface of cocoa's real potential but a lot of investment into the industry is required to tap into this potential.

Out of the 4000 metric tonnes of

cocoa Solomon Islands exported last year, over 70 percent of the income went straight to the rural population. 2012 has been a defining year for cocoa in the country with the ending of the Cocoa Livelihood Improvement Cocoa in Solomon Islands' third Programme (CLIP) in June. The programme will be extended into logging and oil palm. It generates around \$120million to \$150million per year for the Solomon Islands.

The Ministry says the future of cocoa lies with improving the quality of the cocoa trees and the processed beans reaching the surface of cocoa's real potential but a lot of investment into the industry is required to tap into this potential.

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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE & LIVESTOCK MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Agrikalsa Nius

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Q&A with MAL PS Frank Wickham

As the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham, is tasked with running the biggest ministry, in terms of manpower, in the country. Starting his career in agriculture in 1960 as a level 14 public servant Wickham returned to the ministry this year, some 24 years after leaving as the permanent secretary. He spoke to Agrikalsa Nius about his past experiences, the challenges and opportunities in the agricultural sector and his aspirations for the ministry.

AN: How did you get your start in agriculture?
FW: I did my first agricultural degree between 1983 and 1985 before joining the Ministry of Agriculture in 1986. Because of some administrative delay I started off at the bottom at a level 14 public service employee. Later on they would confirm me at level six as a research officer.

Despite my level I had some big responsibilities as the lead local person for the tree crop section. During that time we did some really interesting work including screening the varieties of citrus for pungency and taste. The chill in our chilly came from that time.

I was at the ministry until 1988 when my parents asked me to return home to run a cocoa project. I did this until my children needed to attend school and in 1991 I joined the University of East Anglia in agriculture and environment. In 1993 I became the head of School of Natural Resources. During that time I taught a number of future agriculture officers who are now in the ministry.

In 1996 I left the country to do my masters in England at the University of East Anglia in agriculture and environment. On returning home I managed an European Union project which shutdown in 1999 at the height of the ethnic tension. From there I joined the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environmental Programme SREP, in Samoa and was there

for eight years as the capacity development officer and later the capacity development adviser. I resigned before my term was up because I felt it was time to return home. Back home I did some work for the Ministry of Environment and the LINDP assisting with climate change and project design, that was until I got the call to be permanent secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

AN: What was it that made you decide to come back to the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock after 24 years?
FW: I felt I had built up some experience. I felt that my strengths in strategic management, my experience in the region and my strong interest in agriculture attracted me to the job. When the call came I felt I had something to give back.

Also I felt comfortable - a lot of the officers at the ministry I have worked with and many I had trained during my time at SREP had come up the ranks to be senior officers. So I'm comfortable with people here and that made it easier to accept the offer and to come back to the ministry.

AN: What was your first impression when you returned to the ministry?
FW: When I came back I saw that the ministry needed to strengthen its capacity to provide the key technical

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Auluta Basin project marks milestone

One of the country's biggest agriculture development initiatives, the Auluta Basin Oil Palm Project, marked a major milestone with the handing over of 16 permanent estate titles to landowners.

The Auluta ceremony marked the registration of 6,875 hectares of land to tribes, with officials aiming to complete 10,250 hectares under the first phase of the project's development plans.

The Ministry of Lands presented the PE titles to the trustees of Auluta Basin Resource Owners Association and the East Malaita Resource Owners Association, which also included Deputy Prime Minister Mashelem Mashelem.

The event marked the culmination of years of ground work by the Ministry of Lands, chiefs and landowners to acquire survey and register land in East Malaita for development.

Out of the registered land so far, 4,447 hectares are in East Honiara and 2,428 hectares are in East Saikaka. The aim of the project is to develop the area into an agriculture zone for investors for oil palm development. The Auluta Basin development project has its roots in 1977 when the local area council identified the site as a potential development zone. In 1989 the provincial government confirmed this decision and at the end of the ethnic conflict it was highlighted under the Townville Peace Agreement as a vital project for Malaita to promote development and create jobs for youth.

A vital project for Malaita to promote development and create jobs for youth. It wasn't until in 2007 that the Auluta Basin Oil Palm Project was launched and two years later the project held its groundbreaking ceremony.

The ground-breaking ceremony was presided over by the Prime Minister Philip Tagini says



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World Food Day marked in Honiara

Students, farmers, agriculture partners, stakeholders and the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock marked 2012 World Food Day this year with a march from the Central Market to the Art Gallery in Honiara.

at the Art Gallery close to 100 school children from agriculture classes in Honiara marked the special event with a full day of celebrations, including speeches, music, and the displaying of agriculture produce from the Don Bosco Rural Training Centre and the Tawaneva Technical Farm.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Frank Wickham says the 2012 World Food Day theme of Agriculture cooperatives, key to feeding the world is appropriate in Solomon Islands because it falls in line with the ministry's growing partnership with associations and cooperatives.

"It's about all of us coming together and working together for the greater good. Families are facing hardship because of changes in weather, this calls for cooperative spirit to work together to meet communal challenges," said Wickham.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Connelly Sandakabatu says cooperatives and associations can create

enabling environments that can benefit rural people. "Agriculture cooperatives and associations can lead to members helping and support each other and importantly be a source of recognition for donors and the government to provide support."

"It has become evident that rural farmers and families are uniting into farm associations and savings clubs to help each other consolidate resources into a single strong voice," Sandakabatu says cooperatives and associations can help

lead the agriculture sector forward.

"It has become evident that rural farmers and families are uniting into farm associations and savings clubs to help each other consolidate resources into a single strong voice," Sandakabatu says cooperatives and associations can help

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Changing of the guard at MAL

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock celebrated a change of the guard in early November. After two years as the Minister for Agriculture and Livestock, the Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu was farewell by MAL staff and agriculture stakeholders at a function at the Honiara Hotel where his replacement the Hon. David Tomé was welcomed as the new Minister.

The outgoing Minister in his farewell speech paid tribute to the staff of MAL.

"I simply said the job as best I could. All the credit goes to all the staff at MAL. You are the ones who deserve the credit for the big developments happening in the Ministry."

The new Agriculture and Livestock Minister, the Hon. David Tomé, is an experienced agriculturist with a long career in Extension Services.

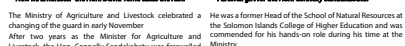
In taking up his new post, the Hon. David Tomé, vowed to continue the good work of his predecessor and to take forward the work of the Ministry.

"I'm coming back to the Ministry that I used to work for," a delighted Tomé told staff and stakeholders.

The Hon. David Tomé is the Member of Parliament for Baegu Atafola in Malaita and has previously held the Police portfolio before joining MAL.



New MAL Minister the Hon. David Tomé takes the oath.



Farewell gift for the Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu.

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Reflecting on Agriculture in 2012

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham has paid tribute to the staff of MAL, stakeholders and partners for their joint effort in taking the agriculture sector forward in 2012.

Wickham says the past year has been a big one for the Ministry with partnerships, collaborations and plain hard work the key in enabling the Ministry to deliver on a number of fronts.

Among the highlights of 2012 was the launching of the Women in Agriculture Programme which provided support to women farmers for a wide range of initiatives from cocoa, copra, kava to flower enterprises.

Wickham says the programme effected the scaling up of Head of Households in 2012.

The past year also saw the setting up of a new national cocoa strategy, a new indigenous fruit and nuts strategy and consultations on a cattle strategy.

"Our approach is now more strategic with better planning. It will make our work in these sub sectors easier because now we know where we are going based on our strategic plans."

In 2012 there was also major developments in oil palm with MAL supporting the survey and registration of land for potential oil palm development in Auluta and Wehisi in Malaita, while a feasibility study was carried out in Choiseul. Wickham says this included collaboration with landowners and associations in getting ground work done on for oil palm development.

For the Quarantine Division 2012, saw the Division build its capacity for carryover border surveillance in the Overlands and Choiseul with the building of staff housing.

The year also ended with the Quarantine Division completing all consultations on draft Biosecurity Bill which will go to Cabinet in early 2013.

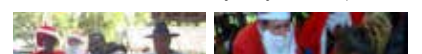
Once enacted and passed by Parliament the bill will modernise the Quarantine Division.

"Rice was another national project that had a big year with the setting up of a commercial rice farm at Gaganu in Isabel. We also supported rice projects in nearly all the provinces."

A partnership with Don Bosco and funding from Food and Agriculture Organisation resulted in 19 provincial Extension



MAL Minister Hon. David Tomé and the Hon. Father Christensen.



MAL staff celebrates Christmas with family.

Launched in mid 2012 Agrikalsa Nius was started as a means of providing a monthly update on the events and news happening throughout the agriculture sector.

Its aim said the former Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, the Hon. Connelly Sandakabatu was to promote agriculture in the Solomon Islands.

"Agrikalsa Nius will highlight the latest industry news, the work of the Ministry of Agriculture, its staff, its divisions, its policy plans and initiatives.

"Most importantly Agrikalsa Nius will highlight the successes of farmers, growers and the stakeholders throughout the country.

"For those outside the sector, this newsletter will be an

introduction to the world of agriculture and the important role it plays in national development."

Although the Ministerial leadership has changed, MAL continues to strive to promote Agrikalsa Nius as a means of highlighting the good work being done throughout the country in agriculture.

Happy New Year and thank you for supporting Agrikalsa Nius.

Agrikalsa will continue into 2013 and is encouraging readers to submit or recommend stories.

For feedback and contributing stories please email:

mal.agrikalsanius@gmail.com

MAL support for in-service students

Rosemary Alabae is just one of the 30 plus agriculture students at the Solomon Islands College of Higher Education supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

As an in-service student she has to divide her time between study and work. It's one of the many challenges that Alabae and her working colleagues deal with. "Studying for this two-year diploma course is a challenge. It's hard work but I think its necessary to improve my skills and knowledge in my line of work."

Alabae has been working in the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock for the past four years as an Assistant Information Officer.

She is part of MAL's drive to improve the capacity of its staff and improve the overall skills level of the agriculture sector.

From paying school fees to accommodation as well as the purchasing of safety wear, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock is committed to boosting the technical capacity of its staff says MAL Under Secretary (Administration) David Patternot.

In 2012 the Ministry spent approximately \$800,000 to support 17 in-service students to take up Diploma in Agriculture Science studies and a number of pre-service

students to do their two-year Certificate in Tropical Agriculture course.

Patternot says the students come from a wide cross-section of the Ministry including staff from Extension, Quarantine, Information and Research.

For Alabae one of the highlights of the school year has been the engineering projects created by agriculture students.

Students from the Ministry made iron cooking stands, crowbars and other agriculture-related items. ●



Rosemary Alabae at the Agriculture Information Unit.

Honey Chicken – Island Style

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons butter or margarine
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1/3 cup honey
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 4 skinless, boneless chicken breast halves



Directions

Preheat a grill or BBQ plate for medium heat.

Melt butter in a small frying pan over medium heat. Add the garlic, and cook until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Whisk in honey and lemon juice. Reserve half for basting, and brush the other half onto the chicken breasts.

Lightly oil the grill grate or bbq plate, and place chicken on the grill. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes per side, turning frequently. Baste often during the last 5 minutes. Chicken is done when the meat is firm, and juices run clear.

For more information on stories in this newsletter or agriculture enquiries contact the Agriculture Information Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.

Ph: 22143/22144 **Email:** mal.agrikalsanius@gmail.com

For the latest agriculture news and stories catch Famas Kona every week on the national broadcaster SIBC at 8.30pm on Monday and 7.30pm on Wednesday.

The Agriculture Information Unit is the public relations arm of the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock. Its role is to disseminate agriculture information to the public and farming communities using radio, newspapers, television, online and print media.

Library

The Solomon Islands National Agriculture Information Centre is now open.

The library has a major collection of books and information on Solomon Islands agriculture. Members of the public and students are encouraged to visit the library for information on agriculture in the Solomon Islands and around the world.

Opening hours

Monday & Wednesday

1:30pm - 4:00pm

Friday

9:00am - 11:30am