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From Eriko Hibi



This month FAO saw further progress in the Forest and Protected Area Management project which aims to strengthen biodiversity conservation and reduce forest land degradation. We highlight how in Samoa sustainable agriculture through this project can benefit local farmers while preserving conservation areas.

Also in Samoa we look at ecosystem-based approaches to agriculture and we cover the need for growers in the Cook Islands to increase production to curtail imports to meet local demand in fruits and vegetables.

We hope that this newsletter will keep you informed of the work we do in partnership with others in the region.

Eriko Hibi

FAO Subregional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands

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Healthy eco-systems, Healthy food, Healthy people

Farming families in Samoan island of Savai'i benefit from sustainably producing nutritious crops in lowland areas while helping to conserve the cloud forest eco-systems in the island's highlands.

FAO has been working with the Government of Samoa in establishing Community Conservation Areas in the villages of Taga, Gataivai and Matautu. Part of a much larger global environment project, the conservation areas were established to preserve the biodiversity and maintain the ecosystem services of intact forest protected areas mainly in the highlands.



Under the slogan – Healthy eco-systems, Healthy food, Healthy people – FAO and its partners set up

demonstration farms to show farmers how to improve productivity of nutritious food crops, ensure sustainable agricultural systems in harmony with lowland forest eco-systems, and make a positive impact on people's diets, health and incomes.

The demonstration farms in Taga, Gataivai and Matautu use tunnel houses and a variety of different types of farm equipment. FAO works in cooperation with the Samoa Farmers Association and Women in Business Development Incorporated in training farmers in Sustainable Land Management) and organic agricultural techniques. More than 120 farmers participated in these training activities.

In Taga the demonstration farm is managed by the village women's committee. The vegetable varieties being prepared for the next crop include Chinese cabbage, eggplant, chilies, okra, lettuce, kang kong, papaya, water melon, green pepper (capsicum), tomatoes and bananas, Root crops such as taro, yams and taamu to name a few have been distributed to the community. Fruit trees like Tahitian Lime and Rambutan have also been planted.

The group actively work the demonstration site and receive direct benefit from the newly learned techniques. Many farmers apply their knowledge by using seedlings from the demonstration farms to produce a large variety of vegetables in their own farms.

Local Taga farmer Notoa Sione would routinely trek to the highlands to plant taro. "Planting taro this way is time consuming and very hard work", he said. He now has a farm made of several large plots close to the family home where he grows a variety of green vegetables. He supplies to vendors in the area. He also grows tomatoes, eggplant, chilies and head cabbages.

Sione said that Chinese cabbage were fast growing and high yielding which produced higher income for him and his family and they don't have as long to wait to harvest unlike taro.

FAO Forest and Protected Area Management (FPAM) Samoa Project Coordinator, Lemalu Sami Lemalu explained that farmers plant taro in the highlands by clear cutting the virgin forests due to their high soil fertility. This farming method is not only difficult and time consuming it destroys the forests of the highlands and their capacity to retain and filter water. Once the protective forest cover is removed soil erosion and flash floods will not only impede the local water supply; it will also lead to sedimentation of the protective reefs and have a negative impact on fisheries.

"The project shows farmers that they can produce a variety of vegetables and fruits closer to home in the lowlands which contribute to their health and generate additional income without destroying the highland forests which are important for the island's ecological balance and their sustainable services, thus contributing to a healthy island population

Farmers in general use 40 percent of the crops for their own consumption while 60 percent are sold on the market and supply tourist resorts located along the coast. The total value of crops produced since the beginning of the project in January 2016 is estimated at SAT \$300 000 (USD115 000) with returns to date of the harvested produce estimated at SAT \$175 000 (USD67 000) .

Sione said he was very grateful for the project and the knowledge and techniques he has learned. Meanwhile he established his own nurseries to grow seedlings for transplanting to his farm.

Establishing conservation areas in the Pacific

The activities are supported by the Global Environment Facility – Pacific Alliance for Sustainability – through the Forest and Protected Area Management project. Its global environmental objective is to strengthen biodiversity conservation and reduce forest land degradation. The FAO/GEF Forestry and

Protected Area Management project covers Fiji, Niue, Samoa and Vanuatu.

[← Back to Pacific News](#)

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Promoting Ecosystem-based Agriculture in Samoa

Biodiversity and ecosystem services are at the heart of sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and contributing to national development goals and objectives.



Ecosystem-based approaches to agriculture – that build on the natural ecosystem from soil fertility, ecological management of pests and weeds, integrated and organic farming systems – to deliver better outcomes for food and nutrition security and reduce negative environmental influences. In addition, ecosystem-based agriculture can open up more opportunities for tourism and eco-tourism sectors and build resilience of communities to the impacts of climate change.

FAO in partnership with the Samoa Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MNRE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), and in collaboration with the Secretariat for the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) and the Pacific Community (SPC) organized a policy dialogue on the role of ecosystem services and biodiversity in agricultural production in the country. The event – organized under the EU-funded project “Capacity Building related to Multilateral Environmental Agreements in African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Countries Phase 2” brought together key national stakeholders, including the Ministry of Health the Federated Farmers Association, Samoa Farmers Association and the Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community.

The meeting was officially opened by Hon. Lemalu Taefu Lemi Taefu, Associate Minister for MNRE, who welcomed the workshop as a key effort in developing a roadmap to strengthen existing synergies between the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements related to chemicals and to biodiversity, by mainstreaming ecosystem-based models of agriculture in Samoa.

FAO Sub-regional Coordinator for the Pacific Islands, Eriko Hibi, stressed how “concrete solutions are needed to acknowledge and value the role of agro-ecosystem services and biodiversity, and to mainstream a more sustainable paradigm of agricultural production that is in line with FAO’s vision of a world free from hunger and malnutrition where food and agriculture contribute to increase the living standards of all in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable way”.

The two-day training workshop was the first step in developing a roadmap to facilitate a transformational shift towards ecosystem-based agriculture and reduce reliance on agro-chemical use in Samoa. The meeting facilitated the stocktaking of existing national policies and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms, considered relevant to the task of creating an enabling environment that can support farmers uptake of ecosystem-based agriculture.

The Samoa Development Strategy (SDS) provided the framework for strengthening biodiversity and ecosystem services aspects of the Samoa National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), the National Environment Sector Plan (NESP) and the National Agriculture Sector Plan (NASP). Other national sector plans, such as Tourism and Health were also considered important to making a shift

towards ecosystem-based agriculture.

The participants were presented with case studies, as well as policy measures that support the uptake of ecosystem-based agricultural practices from around the Pacific islands and across the world. Building on existing policies and national coordination mechanisms under the SDS, and incorporating good practices from around the world, MNRE and MAF will now draft a Samoa implementation roadmap to support and promote the uptake of ecosystem-based practices in agriculture. The roadmap will strengthen Samoa's institutional capacity in achieving important international goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

[← Back to Pacific News](#)

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Growers in the Cook Islands urged to increase output

by Losirene Lacanivalu of Cook Island news

The Cook Islands agricultural sector is unable to meet a target of being able to grow at least 20 per cent of the food needed to feed the nation's population as imports of fresh fruit and vegetables into the country were increasing at a rapid rate every year.



According to the Cook Islands Ministry of Agriculture director of research and development division William Wigmore, "We are looking at \$10 million worth of fresh fruits and vegetables annually to the Cook Islands and meat imports now total more than \$12 million."

Wigmore said imports continued to mount up as efforts were made to increase the number of tourists coming into the country. "This year there has been a marked increase in the number of visitors from offshore and I think we will probably reach 150,000. Numbers are continuously increasing and unfortunately we are not able to meet even 20 per cent of the food needed to feed our population."

Simon Lennard, FAO consultant from Suntec International Hydroponics in New Zealand explained at hydroponic workshop held in October why the Cook Islands needed to make greater efforts to establish farms using the hydroponics method to grow vegetables and other plants.

Agriculture Minister Kirau Turepu, who spoke at the workshop, said the wealth of knowledge that Lennard would share would benefit Cook Islanders. the Ministry of Agriculture has discussed repeatedly with farmers the need to grow enough produce to reduce costly imports. "This workshop will, I believe, drive some people to engage themselves in hydroponics and to the extent of establishing a sustainable business."

The Minister explained one problem Cook Islands farmers were facing was land, which was getting limited for agricultural purposes. Hydroponics would give more people a chance to take up farming. Turepu said the Green Climate Fund gave opportunities in assist growers in the outer islands and Business Trade Investment Board (BTIB) had soft loan policies as part of their assistance packages. "If ever anyone wants to engage into the funds for agriculture, these funds will be available, so there is a window of opportunity which the government can assist to reach out to the people on the ground and to support them".

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New Publication: Pacific agriculture and tourism policy toolkit

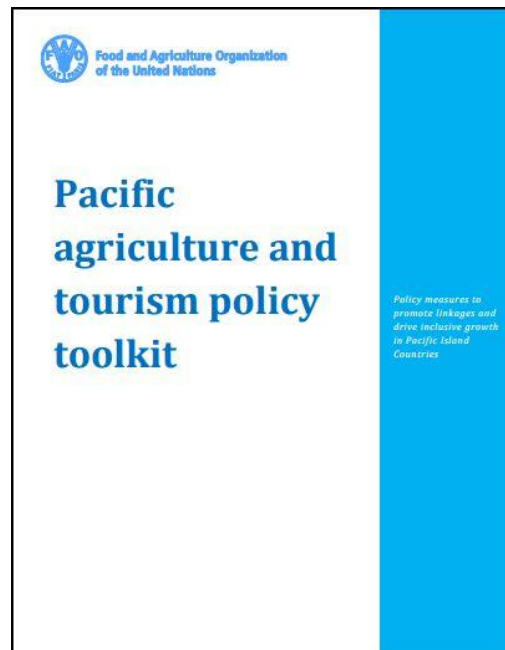
Policy measures to promote linkages and drive inclusive growth in Pacific Island Countries (PIC)

This Toolkit showcases examples of robust policies to promote stronger economic linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors, thus increasing the value of tourism to PICs. Specifically, it provides case study examples of the tools available to policy-makers to improve market opportunities by incorporating local food into the cuisine offerings provided by PIC tourism.

This will not only create employment and business opportunities for rural communities; it will also enhance the marketability of the Pacific as a tourist destination. Furthermore, the Toolkit provides advice on various implementation methodologies to ensure their adoption by national and regional authorities. This resource, therefore, is designed as a practical guide for stakeholders in the PIC sectors of tourism, agriculture, fisheries and finance.

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