

PACIFIC AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY POLICY NETWORK
(PAFPNet)
YOUTH IN AGRICULTURE ESSAY, NEWS, ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY
COMPETITION

Application Form

Applications should be accompanied by this form and addressed to Ms Miriama Kunawave, PAFPNet Secretariat, Land Resources Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Private Mail Bag, Suva to arrive no later than 22 October, 2010. Communication will be limited to winners only or those requesting the return of original materials. Applications may alternatively be submitted by Fax (No. +679 338 6326), hand delivered to the SPC Suva office or emailed to lrhelpdesk@spc.int. Please call +679 3370733 – ext 35344 for further details.

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My interests mostly lie in climate change and agriculture, Organic agriculture, extension services and sustainable development issues in the Pacific. I 'am currently unemployed and wish to operate my own integrated agribusiness some day. I enjoy good music and socialising.

What advice would you give to a young person wanting to start up their own agricultural enterprise? Who can best support them and how?

GUIDELINES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS FOR PROSPECTIVE YOUTH AGRO-
ENTREPRENEURS

In light of the global economic crisis, many enterprises including agricultural trade and investment have suffered massive financial losses which eventuated into many job losses. However, as many economies try to recover and with the rising population and increasing demand for food at the helm of most agriculture forums, investing in an agricultural enterprise can be a suitable option for the many unemployed youth to help sustain the lives of billions. This essay is in two folds, examining issues from a personal perspective of a youth involved in agriculture. In the first stance it will elaborate on pre-agro investment guidelines in consultation with The Northern Territory Government of Australia's guidelines package for prospective investors in agriculture enterprise (www.nt.gov.au). It must be noted that these same guidelines can be used anywhere including Fiji as the basic guidelines remain the same for any potential agro-investor. The essay will then briefly explore the family, the community and agriculture extension as the three most vital support groups for young entrepreneurs.

An agricultural enterprise is like any other business enterprise having guidelines that will need to be consulted prior to making investments. The following guidelines not only address the most basic pre-investment questions but also account for the three basic economic questions of production; what to produce, how to produce and whom to produce for? (*Fouquet R, 2007*). I personally choose to follow these guidelines as they are easy to comprehend.

To begin with the land assessment will determine whether the land is best suited for crops or animals as dictated by the topography (*Tofinga M. 2009*). For example, it would be wise to grow taro on slopes rather than raise animals on it as it's unsuitable for animal production. Choosing which crop(s) to grow is also important as this determines a crop that's in demand. It's senseless to grow a crop that won't bring in any returns as is the aim of any enterprise. Then, one needs to see if that particular crop is grown in that area to check for suitability. For instance

it would be senseless to grow sugarcane in the Central division where the climatic conditions are unfavourable. The land must also meet certain crop/animal growth requirements; sufficient land area, water availability, pasture and fertility to induce proper growth. Alternatively, if the young entrepreneur is considering livestock farming, they need to consider the type of animal and farming system whether intensive or extensive. Suppose the farmer decides to raise cattle then he will consider extensive farming as he will need a larger area for grazing and if it's poultry he can employ semi-intensive mechanisms.

In addition, the young entrepreneur must also determine if the native vegetation needs clearing or not for minimal environmental impacts. For this purpose agro-forestry and agri-silviculture also need to be considered. Land tenure also needs careful examination as it will determine the duration the land can be farmed on, an example of this is our very own leasing scheme where tenants can lease native land for 99 years. Furthermore adequate labour also needs to be available. One can opt to hire local unemployed youths to create employment and to reduce labour costs. Moreover, infrastructure, transport, storage and markets for product also needs to be available as the absence of these components can result in either increase in costs of production or losses in returns. Finally, one must consider the future viability of their commodity and determine whether or not his product will be in demand in the future (www.nt.gov.au). A local example of this is the poultry industry where demand is usually constant and heightened at holiday season.

As a youth engaged in agriculture, I deem the family, community and agriculture extension services to be of paramount importance. These three groups act as pillars of strength for any youth trying to engage in agriculture. In a recent Youth in Agriculture Strategy report by the SPC it was stated that "To support entrepreneurial activities, families and the wider community must help their young people develop business skills, access land and credit where necessary, and open bank accounts" (*Ali & Masianini, 2010*). Family members can help manage returns, assist in land acquiring negotiations while other members can provide cheap family labour or a contribution towards starting capital. Most importantly moral support from family members can act as a driving force in any youth's career. The community can also make substantial contributions in terms of labour, land acquisition, market creation and finance. A few young vegetable farmers have failed in my community as there was a failure to create a viable market within the community so the farmers would have to incur extra costs in search of buyers and this deters them from producing more.

Agriculture extension staff can provide technical assistance in terms of conducting onsite workshops on agriculture production mechanisms and aid in carrying out land assessment tests, providing chemicals and high yielding crops and livestock. According to a personal source, extension personnel can also evaluate investment proposals and redirect them to National Centre for Small and Microenterprise Development and other financial institutions for further advice on loans and financial assistance (*Saurara L. 2010, 19 October*).

In conclusion it can be said that engaging youths in agro-enterprises can help ensure family, communal and national food security while enhancing personal development and employment creation. Taking on any business venture especially by a youth is a challenge with unforeseen circumstances but in the case of a soundly planned and managed ago-enterprise there is much to gain. If the above mentioned guidelines are adhered to it is possible to establish such a profitable enterprise. The families and community members must do their part and not always seek material or financial compensation. Currently, Fiji imports more than it exports, which contributes to its wide scale trade deficit (www.go-fiji.com/agriculture.html) if there is active consultation and collaboration between youths, families, communities and agriculture extension workers we can change the misconceptions many youths have about agriculture and reduce the trade deficits.

(Essay Body Word Count: 995)

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