

Rear-Admiral (Ret’d) Hon. J.V. Bainimarama, CF(Mil), OSt.J, MSD, jssc, psc

**Prime Minister of Fiji and Minister for iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Foreign Affairs**

**Grower Field Day - Maximising Unit Productivity**

**Tokatoka Sautorotoro Trust Farm Wed. 14 Oct., 2020**

**Tunalia, Malolo, NADI 0930 Hours**

**Ki Valelevu i Navatulevu, Turaga na Tui Nadi;**

**Loma ni Tokatoka o Nasautorotoro, Mataqali Nawasakubu**

**E na Loma ni Yavusa o Leweivulani;**

**The Assistant Minister for Sugar, Hon. George Vegnathan;**

**Chairman of the Sugar Research Institute of Fiji, Mr Prakash Chand;​**

**Permanent Secretary, Office of the Prime Minister and Sugar Industry; ​**

**Board of Directors of Sugar Research Institute of Fiji;**

**Heads and Representatives of all Sugar Industry Institutions;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen; and**

**Farmers and Friends.**

Bula Vinaka. I’m so glad to spend this morning here at the Tokatoka Sautorotoro Trust Farm.

Only two short years ago much of this land sat idle, and had so for more than 20 years. But the members of this landowning unit heard the vision we had for our Sugar Industry, and they saw it for themselves. They looked to the incredible assets they owned –– their land –– and they looked within to their incredible drive, now they have achieved incredible success through this Joint Venture with the FSC.

Today, just over 15 hectares of this farm are under cane, with 1,600 tonnes of cane expected to be harvested this year –– that’s 105 tonnes per hectare. So not only is this land among our newest cane-growing regions, it has set the cane-per-hectare harvesting record for 2020.

In fact, I’m told a single land area of 1.7 hectares produced an astonishing 283 tonnes of cane. We anticipate a gross profit of $60,000 this year for this farm, with this new cash-generating vehicle projected to churn out upwards of $325,000 in profits over the next 8-year period. Let that, my friends, show what a committed Government and hard-working Fijians can do together.

When it comes to growing cane, my Government knows where our support matters most. We have guaranteed a price of 85 dollars per tonne. Despite what some people may be telling you, that full payment will be paid to our growers by the close of the season, as promised. We are also easing your cost burden by subsidising fertilizer and weedicide. We are upgrading cane roads. We are covering cane cartage costs. We are investing in mechanization.

We have built better, more productive mills. We are providing cane planting grants. And, as we did here, we are providing technical expertise to landowners who pursue cane cultivation.

All told, we have shown unprecedented level of commitment. But at the end of the day, it is growers who plant and harvest the cane. Your sweat and effort sustain this Industry. As do our lorry drivers, our mill operators, our FSC staff, and our sugar researchers. Government’s role is to create the right conditions for the Industry to thrive; you all do the rest. And here at the Tokatoka Sautorotoro Trust Farm, you have done a damn fine job of it.

Your record-setting achievement holds lessons for every Fijian. When we see this land and we see the Fijians who have made such incredible use of it, we see the tremendous good we can create when Government harnesses the drive and ambition of the people. As we contend with the economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, your example shows us hard work still reaps rewards in Fiji. That gives us hope, and it inspires us all.

Fiji has contained the deadly coronavirus. We have kept our people safe. With thousands still dying by the day overseas, no one should take our good health for granted. But virus or not, we are still living through the worst economic catastrophe of our lifetimes.

I will always speak plainly with our cane growers. Good news or bad, I will always give it to you straight. I will never make a promise I am not prepared to deliver. I will never pretend things are anything other than what they are. Things today are very, very tough. The world economy is on its knees. We have not seen so many jobs lost around the world so quickly since the Great Depression, long before Fiji was ever an independent country. And we cannot say for certain when things will begin getting better.

No industry has been immune to the economic pain. As you know, we have not been able to operate our mechanized harvesters as efficiently as we’d like because technicians from India are stuck overseas. No community in Fiji has been spared either, we all know someone out of work or on reduced hours. Government is providing these Fijians with a steady flow of support.

Nearly $50 Million direct Government assistance has already been distributed –– and more is on the way. We are providing concessional loans to affected small and medium businesses. We are empowering out-of-work Fijians to put their specialized skills to use starting new micro enterprises. And despite Government revenues plummeting, our full support to cane growers has pressed ahead.

But the biggest mistake we can make in this moment would be to pretend Government has every answer to every problem this pandemic has caused. This Joint Venture has proved that hard-working, everyday Fijians have the answers as well.

In this case, Government set the stage for success –– these growers did the rest.

And by working hard they created even more work for our people, hiring 15 Fijians to help with harvesting who were unemployed due to COVID-driven collapse of our tourism sector.

Friends, we know weathering this crisis will take hard work and lots of it. But this Joint Venture goes to show, it will also take new ideas. We must find new ways Government and people can partner together to seize new opportunity. Thanks to our being COVID-Contained, we are one of the only nation on Earth that can run our economy with relative freedom. Within our borders, Fijians can and must press ahead with our national progress. We can put more idle land to use. As we have seen here, we can grow cane.

We can grow other crops as well, and I encourage all farmers, including our cane growers, to make use of idle land to do so. Where we can, we can also support our businesses, our farmers, and our entrepreneurs by buying from Fijian companies, and adding to the range Fijian-made products and services which we export around the world.

No one can tell us when this pandemic will end, but we know one day it will. We know one day our borders will re-open. We know one day our economy will see some version of normalcy. And we must be ready. We can make investments today to prepare for that future. Until that day arrives –– like we have with this Joint Venture –– Fijians must find strength in one another, for we are always stronger together.

By working hard together, we do more than help ourselves, we help our country, we help our economy, and we help our fellow Fijians.

Through thick and thin, your Government’s ears are always open to your challenges. I look forward to our consultations, as I look forward to the success of the Tokatoka Sautorotoro Trust Farm, and of our Industry through the years ahead.

Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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