



PACIFICFARMERS.COM

# NEWSLETTER



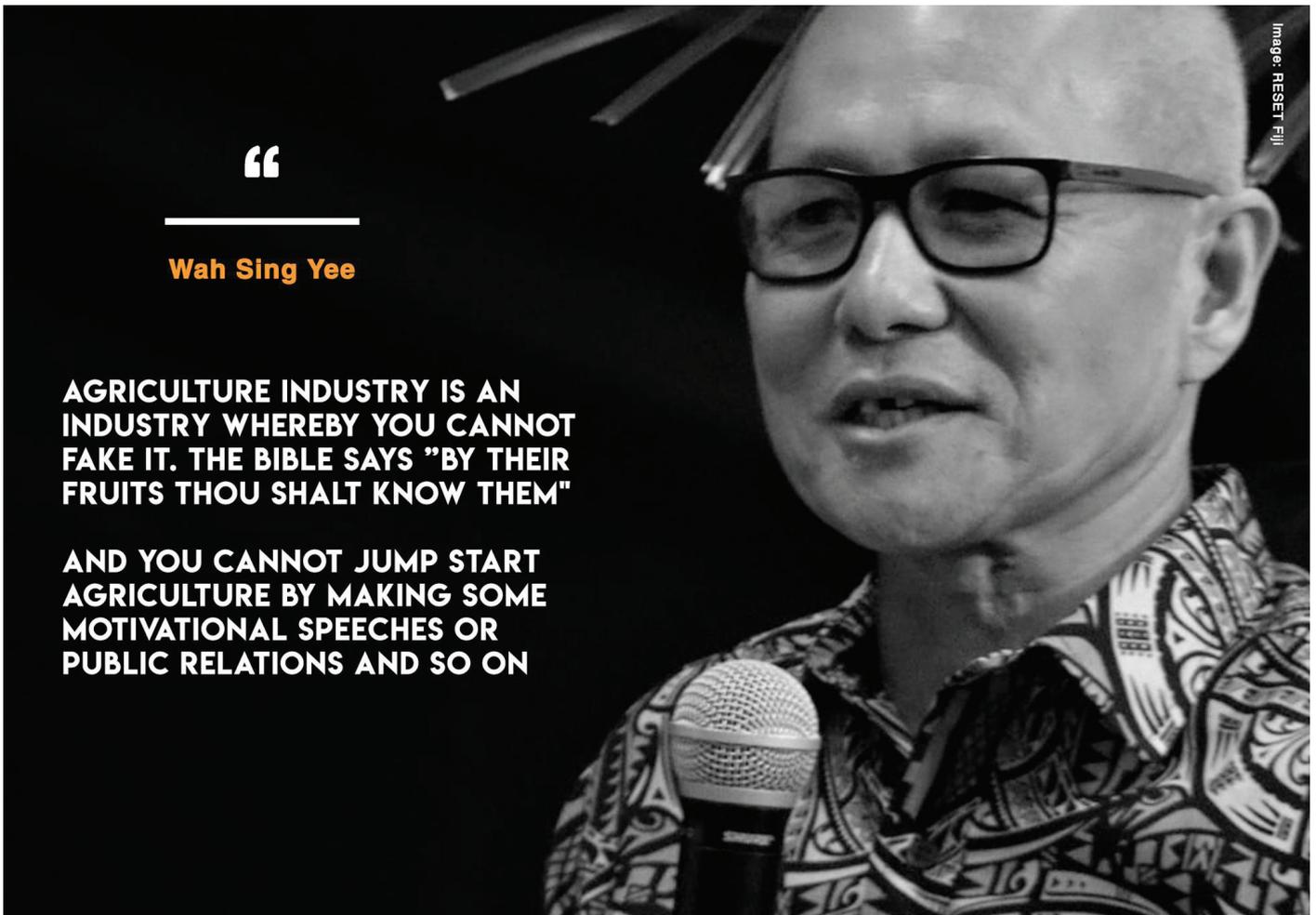
JUNE 2020



Image: RESET Fiji

Bringing you ideas, innovations and talking solutions





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**Wah Sing Yee**

**AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY IS AN  
INDUSTRY WHEREBY YOU CANNOT  
FAKE IT. THE BIBLE SAYS "BY THEIR  
FRUITS THOU SHALT KNOW THEM"**

**AND YOU CANNOT JUMP START  
AGRICULTURE BY MAKING SOME  
MOTIVATIONAL SPEECHES OR  
PUBLIC RELATIONS AND SO ON**

Image: RESET FIJI

The impacts of TC Harold and the global lockdown has sent Pacific economies into a tailspin with domino effects in the agriculture industry.

In our May e-Bulletin, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) announced world merchandise trade will take a plunge by between 13 and 32% in 2020 due to COVID 19.

WTO economists believe the impacts brought on by the decline will likely exceed those of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, and as general manager of Nature's Way Cooperative, Donald Pickering said will be, 'a shock to small countries.'

"The issues are far-ranging; we're losing markets and we're also seeing its size reduce, our traders are no longer buying from farmers while distribution channels have presented a unique set of challenges, in addition to quarantine that's creating further problems for farmers."

Pickering said the opportunity for farmer organisations, development partners and governments is in working together.

"COVID 19 is a global pandemic that's already having tangible effects on our agriculture sector affecting the livelihoods of poor rural farmers who depend on agriculture."

"Investments in small-scale agriculture can help revive food production and create jobs following a crisis of unemployment and enable rural communities to recover"

On the evening of Sunday 21 June, Dr. Andrew McGregor (Kokosiga Pacific [Fiji] Ltd), Wah Sing Yee (Marco Polo), Livai Tora (Nature's Way Co-operative), Lavinia Kaumaitotoya (Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network) and Kyle Stice (Nadi Bay Herbs) joined Reset Fiji's, Stanley Ian Simpson on Mai TV for a discussion on the agriculture industry.

The Replay is now available: <https://bit.ly/3fSNLAP>

# PACIFIC FARMERS HAVE THEIR SAY REPORT

## COVID 19 & Agriculture



The impacts of the global pandemic is estimated at a minimum of AUD \$6.5 trillion, leaving almost all industries negatively impacted.

“In order to measure the COVID-19 impact on the Pacific Islands farming community, a survey was distributed to Farmer Organisations and farmers,” says Kyle Stice, manager of Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network.

“The survey has raised key issues in parts of the Pacific that’s requiring farmers to adapt to new market dynamics, and while the current COVID-19 situation remains dire, there are major opportunities within the agricultural sector to boost the Pacific economy.”

“It’s going to take a cohesive and collaborative approach from all industry sectors and players to develop a strategic recovery plan for the region, and to be completed in stages as the immediate threats of COVID-19 subside.”

View the Pacific Farmers Have Their Say Survey Report: <https://bit.ly/2VuXRQB>

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In April we kicked off the #PacificFarmersHaveTheirSay e-Bulletin series; welcoming the contributions of our members and friends from around the region to share ideas, best practices and inform policy makers.

If you would like to participate, please do so at the following link: <https://forms.gle/9W6KQfCTmPbFEGd67>  
Visit our website: [pacificfarmers.com](http://pacificfarmers.com) to subscribe for the latest e-Bulletins.

Land Will Become Scarce



*The Solomon Islands Virgin Coconut Oil Producers Association warns of a potential unrest IMAGE: Sol Agro Media*

The Solomon Islands is on high alert following the extension of the country's public emergency in response to COVID 19; the announcement was made by the Government of the Solomon Islands as authorities assess the recent destruction by TC Harold in various parts of the country.

Maryjane Hou Kaikari, the secretary of the Solomon Islands Virgin Coconut Oil Producers Association (VCOPA) says the future remains uncertain for its members.

"The government has announced strict travel regulations in the country and it's affecting the movement of producers to the capital city of Honiara."

"We're experiencing low numbers of VCO (Virgin Coconut Oil) production because producers fear our business partner Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands (KPSI) may close its operations and stop paying for VCO," she said.

"KPSI however, continues to buy VCO from producers but should the situation change, we know the indefinite closure of its operations is going to affect our producers drastically."

In an interview with the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON), Kaikari said the full impact of the global pandemic has yet to hit the Solomon Islands.

"As many people return to their home provinces to farm for food, land will become scarce and people will fight to survive."

"Our current issues with distribution channels have not only left our farmers and producers without an income but our customers are also affected with access to our produce and products," she said.

"The practice of social distancing has also affected important communications amongst farmers and producers, particularly for those living in rural areas where there is no access to the internet or network coverage."

"We also expect our farmers will no longer want to work because of the fear of getting infected with COVID 19 and particularly in commercial agriculture."

Despite the challenges, Kaikari said VCOPA remains supportive of its members.

"Our communication lines remain open for producers, we're keeping them updated with the situation in Honiara and around the country"

"Businesses remain open and we are still buying VCO until the Government announces a lockdown," she said.

“Our communication lines remain open for producers, we’re keeping them updated with the situation in Honiara and around the country.”

“Businesses remain open and we are still buying VCO until the Government announces a lockdown,” she said.

“We’re encouraging our producers to practice hand washing at the village level to maintain quality standards in their productions in adhering to measures put in place by the Ministry of Health.”

“We’re also making direct payments into the accounts of farmers and producers.”

Kaikari said more needs to be done and is calling on the support of governments and development partners.

“This pandemic is a wakeup call for all of us, to change our eating habits, to encourage organic farming, increase the consumption of fresh local produce and invest in food security.”

## DISRUPTED SUPPLY CHAIN OPERATIONS A CHALLENGE

### Nishi Calls On Governments To Waive Taxes



*Jenny Nishi says the logistics network is being tested IMAGE: Nishi Trading*

The World Trade Organisation have highlighted the economic impact of the global pandemic COVID 19 will be bad — but the degree to which it will be bad remains uncertain and depends on how long borders will remain closed.

Jenny Nishi, the Project Manager of Nishi Trading in Tonga says the logistics network is being tested as supply chain operations are disrupted.

“While the demand for fresh produce remains consistent, airfreight has stopped and although shipping routes are still operating there will be delays.”

She said: “The coming months is going to be challenging for exports and it’s affecting our operations in production and logistics, infrastructure development and the value chain — it will affect sales and distribution channels.”

“The development of our new facilities have generally stopped because necessary parts for machinery are now taking a lot longer on cargo vessels instead of air freight.”

She said: “In addition to potential food shortages and employees not being able to work on the farm, we’re expecting difficulties getting inputs for farming and construction in the future.”

Nishi is calling on governments in the Pacific region to review the nature of these complexities.

“Waive taxes for businesses and PAYE during this period and allow for a deferral repayment of loans.”

“At this moment we’re pre-ordering in bulk while maintaining contact with the market. We’re also continuing with projects to improve income revenue and we’re holding our meetings and technical trainings online.”

She said: “More work however needs to be done, like putting the focus back on livelihoods and food security, strengthening our networks and outreach to successfully mitigate the threats of COVID 19 in the agriculture sector.”

## BOOST FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

### New Caledonia Faces Labour Shortage



*The demand for organic produce is on the rise in New Caledonia IMAGE: New Caledonia Chamber of Agriculture*

In March, COVID 19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.

In April, six Pacific countries including Commonwealth of Northern Marianas, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam and New Caledonia have reported 254 cases and 7 deaths.

François Japiot, the Regional Manager Cooperation in the Pacific of the New Caledonia Chamber of Agriculture says current impacts as a result of COVID 19 is varied.

“There is no shortage of local agri-products in the stores and while few markets remain open, there’s a shortage of casual labor which is a huge loss for farmers.”

He said: “While there’s been a significant increase in the demand for organic products, there are logistics and transportation issues for those remotely located from markets.”

“We’re also seeing a developing trend in direct trading between the farmers and consumers so communication and information lines are quite good.”

“There are no shortage of inputs at this stage however monitoring is required for seeds, fertile eggs and 1 day chicks.”

Japiot said while the impacts of COVID 19 is having significant repercussions on the global agricultural value chains, it also presented an opportunity.

“New Caledonia imports over 80% of its food products, what happens if imports decreased or stopped? If this continues we will begin to see food shortages, changing market dynamics, quarantine or other barriers that may create further problems for farmers to sell their produce, as well as a further decline in labor because farm employees fear going to work — the impact of the economic downturn will cause shortage of inputs also affecting imports.”

He said: “The New Caledonia Chamber of Agriculture is working with members and various stakeholders to boost food sovereignty and influence policies.”

“We’re establishing information and the coordination of networks with farmer organisations and farmers, especially those who have no or less access to information and who are far from the markets.”

“Governments also need to step in and conduct monitoring and awareness campaigns while also establishing a committee including one for farmers’ to address issues related to food sovereignty and agriculture development for both commercial and smallholders farmers.”

He said: “Food sovereignty and agriculture development will be central to the Pacific.”

## UNITY BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS & DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS CRITICAL

### Tuitahi Anticipates The Worst Has Yet To Come



*The loss of income and markets for farmers may result in agricultural theft IMAGE:GroFed*

The closure of borders in over 70 countries is affecting global agricultural value chains and food systems.

As many farmers are denied access to markets, many more in Asia and the Pacific are forced to abandon fresh produce due to lack of access to storage and cooling facilities.

Sinaitakala Tuitahi, the CEO for Growers Federation of Tonga (GroFed) says the global pandemic is expected to have serious impacts.

“If COVID 19 continues to persist say for the next 3 months — it will be a great challenge to food security — the very basic need of the people.”

She said: “We’re seeing a rise in the consumption of unhealthy foods from retail shops as a result of the lockdown and the loss of income for growers is quite astronomical.”

“Group work is restricted and it’s affecting our exports and loan repayments with the banks.”

Tuitahi anticipates the worst has yet to come.

“Our farmers have no market to sell their crops; it means no income for farmers, a high wastage of primary produce and because there is no market — agricultural theft will occur”

She said: “Sales are already reduced, we expect there will be a shortage of seedlings and planting materials in the future in addition to reduced support from extension services.”

In an effort to enhance the resilience of the agriculture sector against the global pandemic, Tuitahi said Growers Federation of Tonga is working closely with members and various stakeholders to mitigate its impacts.

“There are organisations we are working with including the National Reserve Bank to influence the banks to waive and reschedule the agricultural loan repayments.”

She said: “We’re informing growers to apply to government assistance, particularly the full time commercial growers in addition to identifying our most vulnerable members, and strengthening our networks and outreach through mass communication campaigns and also participating in emergency relief efforts targeting the most vulnerable.”

Tuitahi said governments and development partners need to work together.

“There’s a need for refinancing and deferral of agricultural loans, taxes and lease payments while also increasing the availability of grants to support farming initiatives.”

“Our full time commercial growers need financial assistance and street vendors need to be allowed to sell their fresh produce whilst the main market is still on lockdown to mitigate further threats of COVID 19 on the agriculture sector.”

“There is always a light at the end of the tunnel and this is a time for united partnerships between our governments and development partners.”

## STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

### WiBDi Takes Trading Online



*Tafunai says with the proper support, farmers can build the economy back IMAGE: WiBDi*

For over twenty years, Women in Business Development Inc (WiBDi) has worked with farmers and artisans from around Samoa in ways that honour tradition, technology, and fair trade.

Today they work in 183 villages which for many families mean being able to send their children to school and pay utility bills.

Adimaimalaga Tafunai, the Executive Director of WiBDi says effects of the global pandemic is affecting communication networks as they look to improve existing distribution channels.

“As an NGO, the biggest impact is not being able to get to our farmers regularly and not being able to support them as we did with markets, and even more important as we have much preparation for the annual organic audit.”

She said: “The monthly organic night market has had to be cancelled so we are looking into having an online market with our App developers SkyEye using their Maua App and hopefully offer the opportunity to non-organic farmers as well.”

“We still expect to be able to send out an export shipment of oil, but other export products are affected due to the lockdown and staff not being able to travel from their villages.”

Tafunai believes the challenges are temporary.

“While we’re experiencing reduced sales and exports, agriculture should bounce back and with the proper support our farmers can build the economy back, but the tourism industry will need to be built up as well.”

She said: “There will still be opportunities for value adding and exporting if people were able to work together. They also need site visits and the motivation, especially around seedling supply and markets, we hear non farmers are returning to their farms during the lockdown and it’s welcoming news in these times.”

“We expect things will pick up once public transportation is available but there may be some food shortages because farmers are not working regularly on their farms due to many factors including reduced markets.”

“The hotels aren’t operating which means they are no longer buying produce so that takes away from farmers and may affect their ability or desire to work.”

Prior to the state of emergency declared by the government last month, Tafunai said WiBDi has been working closely with communities.

“We started translating information documents before our lockdown and have added the COVID 19 information to the climate change information we take to our farming families, but this has been slow since we have not been able to make the regular site visits especially on Upolu.”

“Our site visits continue on Savaii as we still need to produce dried tea products for a market in New Zealand.”

“We have our market for dried organically certified lady finger bananas in New Zealand, but this has been put on hold for now, and we would like to start this up as well as other value chain addition to other produce grown by our farmers, as there are export markets still available.”

She said: “Governments and development partners must continue to support the work of farmers and farmer organisations because that’s when we produce our best results.”

## CONFLICTS MAY RISE OVER SCARCE RESOURCES

### Farmers Need To Look Out For Each Other



*SWAG’s Tuailmafua says impacts of COVID 19 is going to be drastic should the crisis extend IMAGE : Ms Sunshine Farms*

Border closures, movement restrictions, and disruptions in the shipping and the aviation industries have made it harder to continue food production and transport goods.

It threatens to cut off supply chains completely and increase food insecurity.

“We’re having issues with our distribution channels which has also seen reduced sales,” Tapu Tuailmafua of the Samoa Women’s Association of Growers (SWAG) said in the Pacific Farmers Have Their Say survey recently conducted by the Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network.

“If the pandemic crisis extends, the effects are going to be drastic.”

“We have already a shortage of farm employees, it’s affecting our communication networks and for older farmers it’s hard to leave home because they’re at a higher risk of getting infected.”

The combined measures put in place by governments in response to COVID 19 may potentially cause more harm than the virus itself.

“Some of the biggest threats are unforeseen fights for scarce resources, and it’s only going to get more difficult with effects to yield, farmers, farm employees and logistics in addition to distrust shown by banks.”

“Fear has stopped people from going to markets and we’re expecting the recovery is going to be slow because these issues are interconnected and the main connector that holds them together is broken.”

While SWAG maintains communications and online trainings directed towards production, Tuilemafua said farmers needed more support from governments and development partners.

“There’s a need for relevant stimulus packages, financial assistance and a farmers bank in the region or on the island, while also increasing resources like seedlings and also utilising technology that can be accessed from the homes of our farmers.”

He said farmers needed to look out for each other in these uncertain circumstances.

## IMPORT SUBSTITUTION

### Farmers Are Selling At Reduced Rates



*Heather Webber is calling on governments to control imports*

The global travel and tourism market is predicted to lose 75.2 million jobs worldwide as a result of the coronavirus pandemic; the Asia Pacific region is geared to lose the biggest loss of 48.7 million jobs.

In the Cook Islands where Tourism makes up more than half the economy, Heather Webber, the Treasurer of Te Tango Enuu says they remain positive despite the heavy toll on business for many farmers.

“All our hotel and tourist resorts are closed, so our fruit in full production we are selling at cost to the families with children so they can have fruit and vegetables to combat COVID 19.”

“We’re selling at reduced rates but we’re also using this time to focus on good food for children and the elderly.”

Unless governments control imports, Webber said farmers will operate at a loss.

“We will have to plant for the next 6 months and we want to do import substitution, if we have a local product, and traders are bringing in overseas oranges for example while the local ones are plentiful, we want the Government to support us by stopping imports that diminish our ability to sell same product locally.”

She said: “We’re calling farmers together to work out a recovery strategy without glutting the market, we need the support of our governments to make it worthwhile for young farmers to plant”

“We’re also putting together specific project proposals to respond to COVID 19 while also reaching out to partners in government and development agencies to identify ways to support the response, but at this point, we need help with import substitution.”

Webber said Cook Islanders were otherwise generally coping.

“Cook Islands have no COVID 19 cases, we’ve sent 688 nasal swabs to New Zealand, half have come back negative.”

“All the homes in the Cook Islands have free electricity for the next 3 months, businesses get a 60% deduction.”

“Those out of work can go on an unemployment package, and the children get \$150 per fortnight as they are studying on the Internet, which is expensive here so this money will assist with that.”

## FOOD ACCESSIBILITY AFFECTED AS DEMAND SOARS

### Increase Investment On Small Scale Agriculture



*Food accessibility is fast becoming an issue following the global lockdown as many turn to backyard gardening*

On Friday May 8, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) announced world merchandise trade will take a plunge by between 13 and 32% in 2020 due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

WTO economists believe the impacts brought on by the decline will likely exceed those of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009, and as General Manager of Nature’s Way Co-operative Donald Pickering said will be, “a shock to small countries.”

“It’s a global issue and it will be a shock to small countries including Fiji, we’re already feeling its impacts which is somewhat unusual as it affects both lives and livelihoods and the significant elements of both food supply and demands.”

“Border closures, quarantines, and market, supply chain and trade disruptions have restricted exported and people’s access to sufficient exports of fresh produces.”

He said: “It’s only going to get harder with the spread of COVID 19, challenges like logistics bottlenecks of not being able to transport food suppliers within country due to cities lockdown, strict movements and curfew put in place.”

In addition to the impacts of TC Harold, the global lockdown has had domino effects in the Pacific with potential threats to food accessibility.

“The demand for food is increasing but we’re also seeing a high interest in farming particularly in home gardening which is a positive impact for Fiji’s agricultural sector.”

He said: “The issues are far-ranging; we’re losing markets and we’re also seeing its size reduce, our traders are no longer buying from farmers while distribution channels have presented a unique set of challenges brought on by COVID 19 in addition to quarantine that’s creating further problems for farmers to sell their produce.”

“The concern for us is namely the economic challenges presented by the high cost of freight and irregular international flights to our main markets in Australia and New Zealand.”

Nature’s Way Co-operative is currently working with Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network, Pacific Agribusiness Research Development Initiative and Phama Plus, Departments of Cooperatives to mitigate impacts.

“We have in the past carried out a rapid survey of the impacts of TC Winston and the April Floods on its members from Sigatoka to Yaqara, it isn’t any different now going forward as we look to identify our most vulnerable members while also strengthening our networks and outreach.”

Pickering said the opportunity for farmer organisations, development partners and governments is in working together.

“COVID 19 is a global pandemic that’s already having tangible effects on our agriculture sector affecting the livelihoods of poor rural farmers who depend on agriculture.”

“Investments in small-scale agriculture can help revive food production and create jobs following a crisis of unemployment and enable rural communities to recover.”

## GOVERNMENTS MUST FOCUS RELIEF PLANS ON SUSTAINABILITY

### Fiji’s Million Dollar Flower Industry Struggles With Logistics



*A wedding set up for the Pacific Week of Agriculture (2019) by Jerry Brunt and Emy Chan Mow of the Orator Hotel in Apia, Samoa*

Fiji’s million dollar flower industry is wilting.

The global lockdown is affecting florists who supply flowers to big events including birthdays, weddings and funerals country wide.

“We’ve found that while sales remain unaffected, its volume has dropped due to social distancing and self-isolation factors,” says Mrs. Aileen Burness, the director of South Sea Orchids based in Nadi.

“The lockdown has also meant that flowers could not be delivered to certain areas. Our agribusiness which involves tours of our home & gardens by groups from cruise ships is currently non-existent.”

While the government has lifted the lockdown in two of Fiji’s major trading centers, Mrs. Aileen Burness says the containment of the virus is critical.

“The spread of the disease could result in lockdowns again and if that happens it will take us longer to recover.”

“We’re having issues with logistics but sales are also increasing for cut flowers and orchid plants because many of our buyers are turning to backyard gardening,” she said.

“While we expect flower sales to continue, the tours will take a long time to start up again.”

Mrs. Aileen Burness shared South Sea Orchids will be working with growers as part of key plans to mitigate the threats of COVID 19.

“We’re communicating regularly with growers to ensure flowers are where they need to be for distribution, we’re also working on activities for a project that will set the groundwork ready for further expansion of activities when things do normalize.”

“It’s really about strengthening our networks and outreach while also increasing communication and awareness with members,” she said.

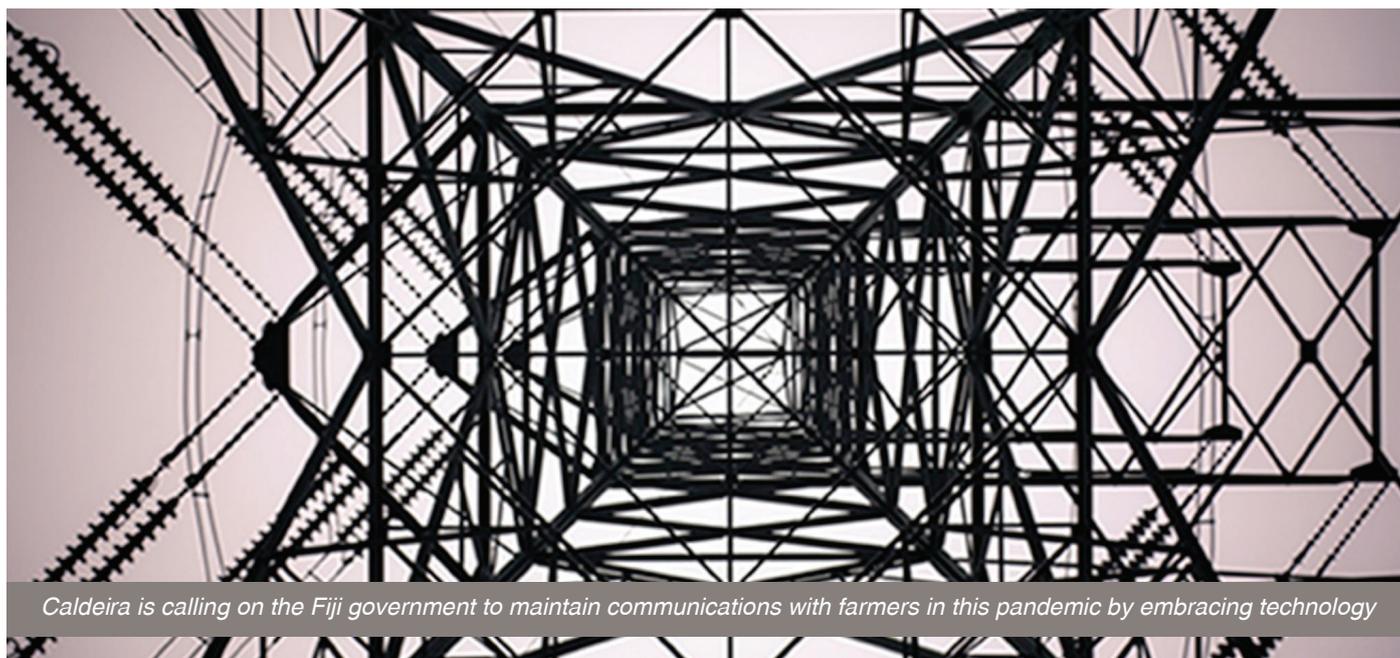
Mrs. Aileen Burness believes the response of governments and development partners will be crucial to the country’s recovery.

“Some businesses have had to reduce staff hours if not staff numbers, and so they need to encourage and provide relief either by way of planting material, or subsidies. It needs to be distributed fairly with a focus on sustainability.”

“We’re encouraging the general public to utilise whatever land they have to grow plants, ideally food and flowers. Flowers not only brighten up the home but also provide a source of income for those looking for them,” she said.

## GOVERNMENTS NEED TO EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

### Sales Have Reduced Nationwide For Beekeepers



*Caldeira is calling on the Fiji government to maintain communications with farmers in this pandemic by embracing technology*

Fiji Beekeepers Association are feeling the sting of the COVID-19 pandemic.

John Caldeira, president of the association, said the future impacts remain unclear for beekeepers.

“Restrictions on public gatherings have delayed larger events and overseas development partners have delayed projects and travel to Fiji.”

While sales have been reduced nationwide, he said the future impacts is likely to increase.

“Health of course is the biggest threat that affects everyone.”

“COVID-19 has contributed to near-term, market weakness. However, the biggest threats facing beekeepers are not caused by COVID-19. The biggest threats remain continued market softness due to increasing honey production, weak honey bee genetics, and a parasitic mite that is spreading through Fiji.”

Caldeira said Fiji Beekeepers Association was using this time to strengthen communications among members.

“Our past experience in mass communication campaigns and humanitarian efforts in response to natural disasters are some of the strategies we are now implementing to mitigate threats of COVID 19.”

“We’re increasing communication and awareness with members, increasing our use of social media to connect with employees, members, markets and traders.”

“It’s too early for us to work with other organisations but possibly in the future. At the moment, we’re taking all our meetings online to replace face-to-face meetings with members.”

He has urged the government to plan for a new reality brought on by the global pandemic.

“Government needs to embrace video-conferencing to maintain good communications, even without COVID 19, video conferencing reduces travel and a big cost and time saver.”

## INCREASE FOOD SECURITY

### Practice More Organic And Agricultural Practices



*Alan Petersen (r) says the impacts of the global pandemic has moved the focus from commercial farming to food security*

The Pacific Farmers Have Their Say Survey Report has warned that the global coronavirus pandemic is one of the most significant economic periods in the Pacific’s history.

The enforcement of trade restrictions, lockdowns, social distancing, reduced income and unemployment has forced individuals and families to seek alternative means for survival.

“We know there are hard times coming,” says Alan Petersen, chairman of Tei Tei Taveuni.

“In this period of uncertainty, the focus for farmers has shifted from commercial farming to food security as there are no major markets for our taro and yaqona (kava).”

For many of PIFON’s member countries, tourism contributed significantly to GDP and with border closures experienced in the Pacific nations, tourism has ground to a halt. It has also meant that PIFON’s members’ markets for agricultural produce through hotels and resorts has stopped.

“There’s been a huge reduction in our export markets, the traders are no longer buying from farmers and we are seeing an increasing number of people return to farming.”

“The hotels have closed and it has left many out of work; there’s not going to be much of a cash economy in the country and as we’re also seeing, people are now returning to barter.”

“With disruptions to the export market and our big buyers in tourism, farmers will need to focus on keeping the environment pristine and practice more organic and natural agricultural practices because inputs will not be available or will cost too much.”

“We should be producing nutrient rich foods, healthier foods — the environment will be able to recover as farmers practice more sustainable agricultural practices — this is a win-win situation for all.”

Tei Tei Taveuni is currently identifying their most vulnerable members while also strengthening their communications network.

“We’re putting together specific project proposals that best responds to COVID-19 and we’re re-strategizing to focus more on livelihoods and food security.”

“We have in the past worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, our Farmer Organisations both national and regional. In these times, governments and development partners should know on the ground response is more effective and efficient if carried out by farmer organisations because we are already setup on the ground.”

“We need to work together and share resources and experiences.”

## SUPPORT FARMERS

### Practice More Organic And Agricultural Practices



*‘Farmers are the key to food security during these hard times,’ says William Lee*

When Fiji confirmed its first COVID-19 case in March, the lockdown that followed in two of the country’s major trading centers was instant, immediately affecting farmers nationwide.

“We’ve lost approximately 80% of our sales and business, the bulk of our produce was left to rot in the farm,” says William Lee, managing director of Lee’s Farm & Micro Organix.

“We’ve had to review the existing delivery channels with many farmers taking their produce directly to the market because of distribution issues.”

“Farmers are the key to food security during these hard times and not the supermarkets, government must ensure that farmers are supported.”

With a population of 900,000 the Fiji government declared the country free of coronavirus on Friday 5 June — for now — after all 18 people who tested positive recovered.

Lee says the impacts of the global pandemic will leave many businesses including farmers in the Pacific struggling.

“The restart is going to be very slow, business models and plans may have to change and we may be forced to make a bigger loss.”

“We’re still experiencing reduced sales, a shortage of seedlings in the market, transportation problems and constraints as well as trying to support farm employees who are afraid to return to work.”

“We were doing home deliveries and also supplied the municipal market when it was possible to reduce food wastage and kept the prices standard to prevent price gouging and move the crops of the farm.”

Lee is taking strategic steps to manage the business operations in these uncertain times.

“We’re re-strategizing our work and shifting the focus to livelihoods and food security while also increasing communication and awareness materials to connect with employees and other farmers.”

“Everyone needs to stay strong and plant moderately.”

## INCREASE EXTENSION SERVICES

### TRTC Calls For Stronger Partnerships Between Governments & Development Partners



*Dragon Fruit Orchard in Tutu Rural Training Centre*

The Garden Island of Taveuni is home to Fiji’s successful Tutu Rural Training Centre (TRTC).

Established in 1969 by the Society of Mary, the institution specializes in non-formal education for self-employment in agriculture, and while the economic impacts of these trainings have seen graduates turnover more than a total annual income of FJD\$1.24m, classes have stopped following the global pandemic.

“Our courses for young farmers and farming couples has been deferred until the situation is normal,” said Father Petero Matairatu, director of TRTC.

“The impacts surrounding the pandemic has not only seen reduced support from extension services but it has also created additional work for staff who are monitoring the kava farms of our students.”

He said: “These farms have more than 50, 000 kava plants and we expect that as time moves on, land tenure will be a future impact as more farmers return to their communities.”

“That’s in addition to shortage of seedlings, planting materials, the changing market dynamics and reduced sales. The concern for us is the nutritional aspect of farming which we see the focus will now move towards commodities and less on food for the families while the middle man determines the price.”

TRTC is creating nurseries for planting materials as part of key strategies to mitigate the threats of the coronavirus pandemic.

“We’re covering a lot of work on the ground and we’re also looking to re-strategize the focus on livelihoods and food security but we can’t do this alone.”

Father Petero said: “While farmer organisations are strengthening small holder farmers towards food security, governments need to increase extension services, set the price ceiling and further promote sustainable farming practices.”

TRTC has to date participated in emergency and disaster relief efforts and advise the public to act local and think global.

## INVEST IN DEMONSTRATION FARMS

### Farmer Organisations Will Play An Influential Role In Agriculture



*A site plan of MORDI Tonga Trust indicating the various demonstration plots*

As the global lockdown extends to its 6th month, the demand for nutritious food is rising.

Jim Pierce, the coordinator of Pacific Organic and Ethical Trade Community (POETcom) says farmer organisations are expected to play an increasingly important role in research services and technical assistance.

“There’s going to be continued interest in agriculture and there will be a need for capacity building; as a result there is a potential threat to the environment from deforestation, erosion and chemical use. Organic and agroecology are critical to success for disaster and climate change mitigation.”

He said: “The success of this work is more likely through farmer organisations than government programs, the participation of farmer organisations will help government programs to be more successful.”

“Production of local food rather than imported cultivars will be more successful and sustainable.”

Earlier this year, POETcom reached out to members to evaluate their response to the global pandemic.

“We focus more on production than marketing but we do network for value chain development; we conducted an open survey for our members and partners to assess the effects from COVID-19 and the needs for recovery.”

He said: “The challenges that have been reported are reduced local and national sales, reduction of export markets, problems with distribution channels, and farmers taking their produce directly to the market due to distribution problems.”

“Our members also indicated future impacts are likely to be over-supply of existing markets and changing market dynamics.”

Pierce explained the bigger threats of the global pandemic will be imported inputs, which he says require the effort of both government and development partners.

“We anticipate pressure from corporate agribusinesses for farmers to become further reliant on imported inputs.”

He said: “Government and development partners can invest in demonstration farms, seed and planting stock nurseries and large scale composting as strategies to mitigate threats of COVID-19.”

“Increase supply of seedling, planting material through research stations and agricultural officers, increase communication awareness materials and use of social media by extension officers to connect with farmers, and focus on livelihoods and food security.”

“POETcom works with both private and public sector, we’ve had more success with recovery than response efforts, and some of the strategies we’re putting into place in this pandemic is trainings and infrastructure to capture local soil and seed/planting stock.”

## BLOG

### A New Home



*Adolfo Serra pays homage to the past while welcoming the future IMAGE: Supplied*

“If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty.”

Gaston Bachelard’s pioneering work, *The Poetics of Space* forever advanced our views on the house as “tools for analysis of the human soul.”

And so, the kitchen symbolizes nurturing, the bathroom purification, the bedroom renewal, and the living room one’s relation to culture. Walls, ceilings and floors mirror interior boundaries, leaving basements and attics with the prisons of our psyche.

Living in isolation and social distancing however has become a new normal for many of us, which illustrator, Adolfo Serra says is changing how we interact with the spaces we call Home.

“The first house as such, according to the Bible, was built when Adam and Eve came out of the garden of Eden, and it was necessary to protect themselves from animals and inclement weather.”

“According to history, the first houses are about 10,000 BC — the first house made on the ground is from Holocene, it’s in Germany and it was plaster,” he said.

“Before, man lived in caves and under trees, collected and guarded only when necessary.”

Influenced by his early childhood, Serra’s work on the home front like his predecessors take on a phenomenological approach.

“Louise Bourgeois drew women home, an organic house, a maternal space, a living shelter but also the universe of authoritarianism and lie.”

“Hopper captured the melancholy of the house, the intimacy of the person under ceilings, shadows and projected lights. In those empty spaces there was also identity,” he said.

“Do-Ho Suh memorizes and creates silk and wire houses. He started these sculptures when overwhelmed by the frenzy of New York, he decided to move to his apartment the calm of his first home in Seoul. Ethereal ways that at some point inhabited.”

While his work pays homage to the past, Serra is also welcoming the future that’s taking effect before us.

“I’ve changed home many times since I was little, changing home also changes the neighborhood, city and friends.”

“Maybe that’s why I draw houses on animals or animals that leave the houses. Over time I’ve realized that for me it’s not as important as a physical place, the house anchored to the ground. But the important thing is to furnish your head so that wherever you are you can always feel like you’re home,” he said.

“We are now isolated, spaces and physical walls should not limit or lock up memories or thoughts of the future. That’s why my house has wings today and my windows show lots of color.”

“Cheer up wherever you are.”

## FARM TO TABLE

### Thinking Critically About The Food We Eat



*Meal preparations aren't only about nourishment for bodies but hearts, conscience and minds IMAGE: Kanu Restaurant*

When The New York Times hosted its first food festival in 2019, Food Editor, Sam Sifton said it was to understand the world — a mission he says is rooted at the heart of the newspaper.

It celebrates a new wave of eaters whose dining preferences are changing and it comes at a time when hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity is likely to increase in the coming months following the impacts of COVID 19.

No longer just a sensory experience, today’s food culture is questioning the process of meal preparations and it’s inspiring a revolution across the industry from farmers to technological experts.

“We celebrate Fiji,” says Chef Lance Seeto, owner of the brand new Kanu Restaurant based in Nadi. “We use our native ingredients and traditional techniques to create a contemporary dining experience. We collaborate with farmers to include euphoric and energy boosting herbs, flowers and spices from their farms to put our diners in an island state of mind.”

Meal preparations aren’t only about nourishment for bodies but hearts, conscience and minds too.

“In these difficult times, it is even more important that we buy local foods instead of imported alternatives,” says John Caldeira, President of Fiji Beekeepers Association. “Buying local provides income to local farmers, who in turn buy other things that help the local economy. Farmers face the uncertainty of extreme weather events, pests and diseases, and other uncontrollable market influences. Buying local in tough times helps the farmer and the economy in difficult times.”

Perhaps some of the The Guardian’s annual Best cookbooks and food writing for 2019 is an indication of the changing times; Greenfeast by Nigel Slater (plant based cook book), East by Meera Sodha (vegan and vegetarian recipes) and Bee Wilson’s The Way We Eat Now (an analysis of food systems and the culinary influence of global economics).

It’s certainly a response to the changing dining preferences as well as the need to be responsible and informed.

“Are my food choices environmentally responsible? Was it produced illegally or unethically? Is it safe to eat? People want more real food today as well as the story behind it” says Kenneth Katafono, founder of TraSeable Solutions. “Many struggle to answer these basic questions and for over 2 years we’ve been working on the challenge of food traceability in Fiji and the Pacific, and in the process we’re giving eaters of today access to this knowledge.”

While The New York Times Food Festival for 2020 has been postponed due to the global pandemic of COVID 19, Sifton says the festival is a reflection of how today’s food culture has transcended from extravagance to simplicity.

“It’s really about supporting your local community,” says Lavinia Kaumaitotoya, the senior programme manager of Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network. “Being absolutely deliberate about your choices, from buying at your community farmers market or at the shop around the corner to eating out with your family. It’s having that connection because each time you make a purchase in your local community, you’re directly supporting a healthier and sustainable food system.”

## TOURISM

### Will It Be The Collapse Of The Pacific?



*Tourism provides more than 60 percent of some the Pacific Island nation’s overall GDP IMAGE: The Rarotongan Beach Resort & Lagoonarium*

The world is braced for recession despite slashed interest rates and trillions of dollars being pumped into economies by governments and central banks.

Two questions we’ll be hearing in the coming weeks and months are; “How bad will it be?” and “How soon will we recover?” In April last month, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) fired a warning on the coronavirus’s economic toll saying there’s never been anything like it since the Great Depression.

“As countries implement necessary quarantines and social distancing practices to contain the pandemic, the world has been put in a Great Lockdown,” says Gita Gopinath, the I.M.F’s chief economist.

The fund projects the global economy will contract by 3 percent in 2020, its impacts more severe than the last recession for both advanced and developing economies when the world economy contracted by less than 1 percent

between 2008 and 2009.

“The magnitude and speed of collapse in activity that has followed is unlike anything experienced in our lifetimes,” she told *The New York Times*.

Despite challenging health services in the region, the Pacific is coping who according to the Pacific Community (SPC) have reported 270 cases and 7 deaths as of Friday 8 May. The numbers are substantially lower in comparison to the 1,628,576 cases in Europe, 668, 792 cases in Asia, or the 1,367,638 cases in the United States.

If anything, the island nation of Samoa have effectively shown the region how to respond to a crisis of this scale as they became one of the first to close their borders following early detections of COVID 19 in the Pacific. The quick response follows the measles epidemic that saw 81 deaths and more than 5,000 cases in October last year.

“All those intending to travel to Samoa to attend birthdays, weddings, reunions, funerals, conferences, sports, etc. need to cancel their travel plans,” the Samoan health ministry said in a statement.

Should there be an outbreak in the region, the Pacific is at a very high risk of facing a sharp mortality rate due to lower levels of immunity to outside diseases, as it was with the 1918 flu where the island nations of Tonga, Samoa, and Tahiti lost close to 20 percent of their populations.

While international travel restrictions may be keeping the Pacific safe from a major outbreak, the global lockdown has hit the region hard, leaving thousands without work and supply chains disrupted. It was only in March when the Rarotongan resort in the Cook Islands announced to more than 200 staff that their 3 resorts will close.

“This is heart-breaking, we have staff here that have worked for this business for 20 years and more, who have given their hearts and souls to this place” says Tata Crocombe, the managing director of the Rarotongan resort.

“I don’t think we have hit the bottom yet. We have never, and probably will never again, see anything of this scale in our lifetimes. It’s the single biggest financial crisis to hit the world in 100 years — the impact is going to last long after the virus disappears. I told our staff the facts, they are intelligent people, that we will have no guests, zero occupancy means no income. Rarotonga and Aitutaki are closed for business,” he told *Cook Islands News*.

“This will be catastrophic,” says Tony Whitton, the managing director of Fiji’s Rosie Holidays and Ahura Resorts who plans to reduce its workforce from 600 workers to 40 essential staff. “My view is that it will take one year at least — so until the end of 2021 — just for the industry to recover and we won’t see growth until at least 2022,” he told *The Guardian*.

At least 5 percent of Fiji’s population — more than 40, 000 people — have lost their jobs mostly in the tourism industry as recently revealed by *The Guardian*. It’s expected to be a major disruption to supply chains where tourism provides more than 60 percent of some the Pacific Island nation’s overall GDP.

“For many of our member countries, tourism contributes significantly to GDP and with border closures, flight cancellation, country and city lockdowns experienced in the Pacific, tourism has ground to a halt,” says Kyle Stice, the manager of Pacific Island Farmers Organisation Network (PIFON).

“This has seen tourism related businesses and employees on reduced hours, loss of employment for an unknown period of time. It has also meant that PIFON’s members’ markets for agricultural produce through hotels and resorts has closed because tourism to the Pacific has stopped.”

“In saying that, this is an opportunity to lay the groundwork for farms and farmers who are attuned to sharing their farm as an Agri-experience. A few of our members including Foundation for Rural Integrated Enterprises & Development and Bula Agro are now working with hotel staff and leading the way in this work.”

“How bad will it be?” and “How soon will we recover?” these questions are unsurprisingly the subject of heated debate amongst economists, and so for now it remains unanswered.

## How It's Inspiring Hope During The COVID-19 Pandemic



*Prominent Fiji Artist, Lambert Ho took social media by a storm this morning when he announced his latest project  
IMAGE: Lambert Ho Painting*

In these times of social distancing, art is bringing us closer.

With more than 4 million people affected by coronavirus and many more in lockdown or battling the pandemic on the frontlines, art is uniting and connecting many lives around the world.

“Bringing people together, inspiring, soothing and sharing: these are the powers of art, the importance of which has been made emphatically obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic,” says Audrey Azoulay, the director general of UNESCO.

“Amateur and professional artists are tapping into the infinite resource of creativity to relay health guidelines and share messages of hope.”

“The most famous work of Leonardo da Vinci has been revisited in a great variety of ways: the Mona Lisa self-isolating in the Louvre Museum, or covering her enigmatic smile with a surgical mask.”

Despite the crisis, art she says is proving its resilience.

“Ideas are popping up everywhere; neighbors are gathering at their windows to sing or project a film, many artists are imagining innovative and creative solutions to continue communicating with their audiences, and orchestras are working together remotely.”

“For example, on 21 March, in Mexico City, a UNESCO Creative City, musicians and artists gave an online “Spring Night” concert which attracted no less than 1.5 million online spectators, spreading the success of the event across the country.”

“The challenge of keeping art alive, now and in the future, is to support culture professionals and cultural institutions, and to promote access to art for all.”

### Prominent Fiji Artist Trades In Time For Hope

Lambert Ho this morning took social media by a storm when he revealed his latest project.

He made the announcement on Barter For Better Fiji, an initiative by Marlene Dutt that's gaining traction among citizens in response to COVID 19.

“I would like to paint murals on city walls, to make our towns a little more beautiful.”

“I’d like some youth to help me, I will barter my talent and time in exchange for people and businesses to give me paint. Let’s turn ugly into beautiful!”

And the response is one of enthusiasm.

“Done!” says Ethan Buksh, director of Kids First — a kindergarten and daycare centre in Suva and Nadi. “We’re opening a new school in Denison Road that has huge bare walls in the playground, we also have parents and students happy to pitch in.”

“How about those of us in Suva? We can pitch in a can of paint!” says Pulotu Rika, a follower of Lambert Ho’s work. “I’m loving the spirit of this work and you have my support.”

The initiative is also generating a high response from youths who have shown their interest in helping the artist paint walls across the capital city.

## Farmers Who Sing

Farmer, Solo Kaumaitotoya recently opened the doors to his family farm in Nadi to honor mothers around the world.

The virtual event went viral within minutes as the award-winning artist performed a collection of timeless Fijian classics.

“Lovely singing and happy mother’s day! Love from all of us here at South Sea Orchids farm,” said Mrs. Aileen Burness.

“Thank-you for opening your home and sharing some great Fijian numbers, I couldn’t think of a more relaxing way to unwind and wrap up the week,” said Losalini Qiolevu.

What should have been an hour long performance quickly escalated into three as song requests poured in from around the world.

“Our phones have been going off since Dad opened the event with Isa Lei Lia” said Lewatu, Solo’s only daughter who was tasked with the responsibility of managing social media interactions.

“We had a session last weekend which gave people a preview to what they can expect and so it’s been off the hook since we went LIVE this evening.”

“It was initially about connecting with our family and friends but it’s gone much bigger than that now.”

The evening came to a close with Solo’s hit, “I Tinaqu” a song he had originally penned for his late mother which took out honours at Fiji’s Vakalutu-i-Voce Music Awards in 1994.