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Agritourism: 'Prodaktif Turism Blong Yumi' Support Week

Apr 24, 2021



The Agritourism Business Support Week held at Breakas Beach Resort from the 19th to the 23rd of April was designed to capacity build 30 agritourism operators that have met the criteria from the Department of Tourism to attend.

Part of this capacity building was for various Government agencies to inform the agritourism operators on how each Government Department is supporting the development of agritourism in Vanuatu and how this support can further enable agritourism operators in Vanuatu to thrive.

The Director General of the Ministry of MALFFB Moses Amos opened the Agritourism Business Support Week and stated “there have been many years that have passed that we have put all the eggs in the tourism basket. Now we must look how to lessen the dependency. I hope that Director General’s and Directors take the Agritourism Diversification Program seriously, and I commend the National Agritourism Coordinator Mrs Votausi Mackenzie-Reur for facilitating this

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important process. We must collaborate to strengthen agritourism in Vanuatu, this needs all of us. It's no longer about solos. The role of the Ministries is so important, we must work together and break down the walls".



The agritourism operators also received a full program of training based on preparing for the “new normal” which requires businesses to diversify to manage risk, produce high quality products and services, conduct COVID-19 safe business practice, and have a greater online presence.

This involved sharing experiences and ideas of existing and new operators, industry experts, policy, and decision makers.

The training covered field trips to ACTIV, The Moso Resort, The Havannah Resort and Havannah Eco-Lodge to talk about high quality tours and accommodation, agritourism product development presentations from successful international agritourism operations from Australia, Samoa, and Fiji, COVID-19 Safe Business Operations (SBO), first aid training, safe food handling, how to prepare traditional cuisine in a hygienic setting, online marketing with the Vanuatu Tourism Office (VTO) and booking platforms, financial management, and developing business plans by the Vanuatu Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI).

The Agritourism operators also received first aid kits, new smart phones and data sponsored in part by Digicel, and new business logos developed by Pandanus Consulting.

Dr Cherise Addinsall who's research specialises in agritourism in the Pacific represented the Pacific Agribusiness Research for Development Initiative (PARDI 2) who was a key funder of the event.

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Dr Addinsall stated that Vanuatu is leading the way in the Pacific in this space and that “you can think of agritourism as the potential for Vanuatu’s farmers, agribusinesses, chefs and communities to educate and promote Vanuatu’s food, local cuisine, culture, value added products and handicrafts to domestic and international tourists to drive the sale of local goods within the tourism industry”.

Patricia Bibi from the ACIAR PARDI 2 project stated that research is showing experiential travel through agritourism will be the most sought after travel in COVID 19.

CEO of the VTO Mrs Adela Issachar Aru supported both Dr Addinsall’s and Mrs Bibi’s comments stating that “Vanuatu already has all the knowledge to do this but what we need is support to turn this knowledge into a product that tourists pay for. We also need to raise the status of agritourism products and experiences, and partnership with Air Vanuatu to distribute information on food experiences, and build agritourism into marketing platforms such as Toktok etc”.

The goal of the Agritourism Business Support Week was to ensure going forward that Vanuatu has one Agritourism Diversification Program and one meaning of what agritourism is to guide ongoing research and development in Vanuatu. Mr Jerry Spooner stated “we had an Agritourism Plan of Action that finished last year, it was a good start, it focused a lot on linking primary producers to resorts, but it jumped ahead without addressing a key fundamental issue. The Agritourism Diversification Program addresses revival and education to increase pride in our local food, we cannot strengthen linkages between agriculture and tourism or develop agritourism if our people do not have pride in their own local food, traditional cuisine and farming systems”.

Dr Basil Leodoro was the MC for the event and stated to the participants “let’s look back at our local food, why have we moved on from our food that protects us. COVID-19 affects people with existing medical conditions that our local food protects us from, we need it now more than ever”.

He then went on to describe agritourism and suggested “I talked with one of the agritourism team members, and I liked the quote that agritourism is about being paid for storian, it’s about storian of our life. It’s vital that we understand agritourism, slow food and local cuisine and that there is a difference between them”.

Mrs Votausi Mackenzie reinforced this message alongside Leo Vusilai stating “every single day someone is dying, why are people dying? We have a shame and loss of pride in our local food, it is the superfood, why are we looking elsewhere? As the National Agritourism Coordinator I don’t align with one Department I’m here to make sure all Departments support agritourism and work together”.

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The week ended with all agritourism operators doing short presentations of their businesses to develop a Vanuatu Agritourism documentary.

Julia King stated in her presentation “I’m so impressed with all of the amazing locally owned agritourism businesses we already have in Vanuatu. Our local agritourism businesses need relationships, every day I come here I’m telling a story, a mama tells me ‘your basket is nice’ and I say ‘mama blo Torba hemi mekem’.

“At every opportunity I’m promoting local products and services. It’s all about empowering our local people, let us support each other and their families and buy local!”

The Agritourism Roundtable Storian on Friday afternoon concluded with a Statement of Intent for progressing agritourism in Vanuatu and the intermittent launching of the Vanuatu Agritourism Association who Mr Kalo Nathaniel was elected as President.

The First PA of Finance, Mr. Ronald Nafuki on behalf of the Minister of Finance commended the Director of Tourism and the Agritourism Business Support Week organising team for holding a high-quality training and collaborative event for agritourism and expressed his commitment to working with the newly formed Vanuatu Agritourism Committee.

The Director of Agriculture Mr. Antoine Ravo added that “this week showed that while it is a difficult time, there is a bright future in Agritourism opportunities and many potential opportunities, and there is confidence by the private sector and the government for support”.

The Director of Tourism Mr Jerry Spooner closed the week and stated “I’m so impressed with the positive energy during this week, there were so many smiles and laughter and excitement to apply the knowledge learnt this week to improve your agritourism businesses.

This shows the strength and resilience of our people and I’m proud to support on behalf of the Agritourism Committee our newly formed Vanuatu Agritourism Association in which Kalo Nathaniel is the newly elected interim President.

“I want to acknowledge the New Zealand Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) who have been here through our sustainable tourism journey from the beginning and our key funders of the event the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Pacific Agribusiness Research for Development Initiative (PARDI 2), The European Development Fund (EDF 11), Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP) and partners Vanuatu Department of Agriculture and Vanuatu Department of Industry.

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