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Votausi Mackenzie-Reur appointed National Agritourism Coordinator

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With the significant loss of foreign exchange and Government revenue from the tourism industry as a result of the COVID 19 Global Pandemic immediate measures must be taken to address leakage, provide long lasting benefits and a higher value less vulnerable and dependent tourism industry in the long run.

By supporting local industry development in agritourism, and agribusiness, local markets and jobs can be created based on supporting rural farmers, rural women (through the harvesting of local nuts, coconuts and other produce, handcrafts etc.), more jobs in agri-processing facilities and more local products available on store shelves, for export and for sale within the tourism industry once the border restrictions are lifted.

In response to this urgency the Vanuatu Government has recruited Ms Madame Votausi Mackenzie-Reur as the newly appointed National Agritourism Coordinator under the Ministry of Trade, Tourism Co-operative and Ni-Vanuatu Business to oversee the implementation of the Agritourism Diversification Program. Supported by the newly appointed Agritourism Officer Ms Norah Rihai, Ms Mackenzie will have the responsibility of co-ordinating all relevant Government Departments to deliver on outputs within the Agritourism Diversification Program.

The Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Policy (2019-2030) is guiding our Vanuatu Sustainable Tourism Strategy (VSTS) (2021-2025). The VSTP aligns with the National Sustainable Development Plan (2016-2030) and provides a vision, values and objectives for tourism to protect our traditional economy, safeguard our environment, enhance the wellbeing of our people and increase our resilience against external threats such as COVID-19 and climate change. The Agritourism Diversification Program is one of the key program of work in the VSTS.



Data from the Pacific Destination Differentiation Research: Interim Presentation August 2020 shows that Vanuatu's tourism industry had no point of difference. The IVS also shows that Vanuatu's cuisine was not a draw card for travellers. The Agritourism Diversification Programs of work aims to increase the use of local cuisine in the tourism industry and create a point of difference with Vanuatu's local cuisine through the Traditional Cuisine Revival Program, while the Slow Food Educational Program seeks to increase the use of local sustainable organic produce within the tourism industry and raise the quality of food served to tourists. A number of other programs such as the: Agritourism Market Research and Support Program; Agritourism Marketing Program; Agritour and Agritourism Events Product Development Program; Agritourism Value Added Product Development Program; and the Strengthening linkages between primary producers and the tourism industry Program will work across Government Departments to deliver a co-ordinated approach to making real progress in Agritourism development with the aim of re-positioning Vanuatu as the leader in this space throughout the South Pacific.

Ms Mackenzie stated, "The Agritourism Diversification Program is a call to think outside the comfort zone; to reset our tourism industry to address the significant high leakage it was experiencing; to realign the tourism economy to traditional values and to adapt and become more resilient and sustainable while resisting the urge to return to 'business as usual. We will never go back to 2019 and that's something we all need to accept and the sooner we do that, the better it is for everyone."

The New Zealand Government under the Tourism Support Program (TSP) and the Australian Government under the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), Pacific Agribusiness Research for Development Initiative (PARDI 2) are acknowledged for their support in the development and implementation of the Agritourism Diversification Program and The European Development Fund (EDF 11).

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