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What is Agritourism: Produktif Turism Blong Yumi?

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Traditional Cuisine Cooking demonstration as part of the Agritourism Business Support Week

The Agritourism Business Support Week held at Breakas' Beach Resort on April 19th till April 23rd supported 30 Agritourism Operators throughout all 6 Provinces of Vanuatu, through a wide range of training and capacity building activities.

The week also consisted of an Agritourism RoundTable Storian in which the Agritourism operators, Government stakeholders, Non-Governmental Organisations and Donor partners discussed how Vanuatu can further develop agritourism as a key resilience strategy.

Director General for the MALFFB Mr Moses John Amos reinforced this in his opening speech for the Agritourism Business Support Week when he stated, "My hope is for Director Generals and Directors to take agritourism seriously, we must collaborate to strengthen agritourism in

Vanuatu.”



A key priority for the newly formed National Agritourism Committee is to strengthen this collaboration. Prior to the Agritourism Business Support Week the committee sought to actually define what agritourism is and communicate this to all the stakeholders during the Agritourism Business Support Week, as there has been much confusion among the various stakeholders in Vanuatu.

The National Agritourism Committee unanimously agreed on the Bislama term: Produktif turism blong yumi, produktif meaning all productive sectors (Agriculture, fisheries, livestock) and turism blong yumi meaning it's based on tourism activities that provide an educational experience into the local farming systems, local produce and value-added products of Vanuatu.

This definition of agritourism forms a connection to how agritourism is described in the academic literature while enabling it to be applied at a practical level for agritourism development in Vanuatu.

Having a clear definition of agritourism that fits the local context in Vanuatu is crucial in making sure all Government policies and plans in agritourism are on the same journey and working towards the same goal.

This also helps to communicate to development partners a clear pathway for agritourism development in Vanuatu and helps our agritourism operators to further develop their products to meet tourists' expectations.

The confusion around agritourism in Vanuatu started with the entry of organisations such as the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and the Caribbean Research and Development Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, IICA) into the South Pacific as their key objectives for agritourism were supporting

the supplying of local produce to the tourism industry which can also be seen as the key priority in the Vanuatu Agritourism Plan of Action. National Agritourism Coordinator Ms Votausi Mackenzie said, “The Vanuatu Agritourism Plan of Action was a great start to raising the profile of agritourism in Vanuatu.

After a review of the Vanuatu Agritourism Plan of Action we have found that we now need to address the key issue that we are experiencing in Vanuatu which is the loss of pride in our own local traditional farming systems, our local food and traditional cuisine.

We cannot put it on the tourism industry to increase the use of local food if their customers are not seeking it out. Therefore we must raise the profile of our local food, our traditional farming systems and our traditional cuisine so that they become attractions in their own right and this is what the Agritourism Diversification Program seeks to do”.

Department of Tourism’s Agritourism Officer Ms Norah Rihai stated, “Supporting diversifying through agritourism could protect businesses in Vanuatu from the volatility and unpredictability of the tourism industry. Positive outcomes could lead to increased disposable income, enhancing preservation of cultural knowledge and promoting more sustainable agricultural practices and the consumption of local food”.

Patricia Bibi from the Pacific Agribusiness Research and Development Initiative (PARDI 2) project funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) stated “research is showing experiential travel through agritourism will be one of the most sought-after travel experiences from Fiji and Vanuatu’s key source markets.

Dr Cherise Addinsall PARDI 2’s lead agritourism researcher for Vanuatu stated, “While there is a desperate need to ensure Vanuatu’s tourism industry addresses the high import of produce and value-added products that could be supplied locally, this should not be confused with agritourism. However, you can think of agritourism as the potential for our farmers and agribusinesses to educate and promote Vanuatu’s local food, traditional cuisine, culture, handicrafts etc to tourists (both domestic and international) to drive the sale of local goods within the tourism industry”. The National Agritourism Coordinator Ms Votausi Mackenzie-Reur stated “Lapita café tried many years ago to run a café that served all local food and supported only locally made products, however it was not well supported by tourists or locals unlike many other countries where their local population are proud of their food and their local cuisine is an attraction. It’s up to all of us to change this story. Through the work I have been doing with the Pacific Island Food Revolution in collaboration with Robert Oliver and Leo Vusilai we are starting to see a positive change, but it’s not fast enough. Agritourism is not just an economic strategy it’s a lifesaving strategy as the rates of our people dying too young from preventable disease increases.

Our local food is the answer and it will take everyone to support the ideas of agritourism in Vanuatu. Eat local, buy local value-added products and promote and re-educate everyone about our traditional farming, local food and traditional cuisine so that we can all be proud again of our cultural food heritage”.

- The Agritourism Business Support Week was funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), the European Development Fund (EDF 11), and the Vanuatu Skills Partnership (VSP).

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