Bulaccino Organic Farm

Bulaccino started as a small family-run cafe in Nadi in 2006. Over the years they have expanded to new sites in Nadi as well as in Suva. To support their focus on using local, fresh ingredients, they acquired a 30 acre former sugarcane farm close to Nadi. The land required significant rehabilitation and now supplies produce directly to Bulaccino cafes. The business employs approximately 70 people between their two cafes and the farm, of which approximately 70 percent are women.

# Agritourism proposition

Bulaccino identified an opportunity to diversify and increase revenue to support their organic farm activities through opening their farm to visitors. They planned to offer tours of the farm as well as develop a new on-site cafe that would provide a full farm-to-table menu. Their proximity to Nadi, connection to their cafes, and a near-unique visitor experience were considered strengths. To ensure a high quality experience, improvements were required to the existing infrastructure.

# Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

As for many businesses in Nadi, Bulaccino was severely impacted by the closing of Fiji’s borders to international visitors. Many of Bulaccino’s customers are tourists and Nadi residents who work within the tourism sector. As such, their customer base shrank due to both the absence of tourists, and reduced local spending. The business was further affected by forced closures during lockdown periods. This in turn reduced the farm’s income as well as the available capital for investment to make the farm visitor-ready.

# Agritourism Support Programme

## Support requested

Bulaccino sought support through the Agritourism Support Programme to create a roofed bure area on the farm. This area would provide shade and shelter for farm tour visitors, a seating area for the on-site cafe, and a meeting space for an existing community of organic farmers to share knowledge and best practice. Between October 2021 and March 2022, Bulaccino planned to construct a concrete base and transfer and renovate a bure structure from another location, undertake a soft opening for domestic visitors to test the farm experience, and launch a full farm-to-table experience for the international market. The target was to double the farm’s revenue once tours started.

## Successes

* The shelter space was erected.
* There was a soft launch of the farm tour with the domestic market which received positive feedback.
* There has been a steady growth in the number of enquiries for the farm tour. A video of the farm plays on screens in their cafes, attracting interest.
* The shelter has provided a focal point for visits from academia and the development sector with an interest in the rehabilitation of the farm from sugar cane fields.
* Group trips from the local market have occurred, including 3 groups from visiting development partners and two couples. Despite the increase in enquiries, Bulaccino have been hesitant to accept bookings due to extended adverse wet conditions.
* Bulaccino has become an increasingly important voice within the Organic Agriculture movement in Fiji.

## Lessons learned- the owner’s perspective

Bulaccino identified several key uncertainties in their Market Readiness Plan including uncertainty with regard to the weather. Bulaccino reported that an exceptional number of rainy days between November and March slowed their preparations and deterred them from launching the farm tour to international visitors.

The period of engagement coincided with the opening of international borders and the opportunity to fully reopen the cafes. Bulaccino also reported that due to their landlord increasing the rent at their main Nadi cafe location, they were also forced to relocate and reestablish on a different site. These challenges for their core cafe business drew time and focus away from establishing the farm tours.

## Community impacts

### Economic impacts

Bulaccino’s cafe business has gradually picked up since the lifting of most Covid restrictions and the opening of the border. They have had to move premises several times during this period. The financial support through the programme enabled Bulaccino to continue with their aspirations for their farm at a time when they had limited financial resources.

### Social impacts

Many of Bulaccino’s staff members work in the cafes and on the farm. Approximately, 50 percent remained employed on reduced hours through the pandemic. Keeping the farm going and developing, with for example the shelter, provided focus to the work on the farm.

### Environmental impacts

A higher profile for the farm has also generated interest from academia and the development sector in its transformation from an old sugar cane farm with degraded soils to a healthy organic multi-crop and animal farm. Bulaccino has become a strong advocate for the organic farming sector in Fiji.

# Future steps

Bulaccino anticipates launching the farm tour to international visitors in July 2022. Once tours are operating they plan to add the fully operational kitchen and cafe adjacent to the new shelter, to integrate the space into the farm-to-table experience.

| Bulaccino Organic Farm was supported through the PARDI2 Fiji Agritourism Support Programme. The programme provided existing agritourism experience operators and agribusinesses with technical support and mentoring to be market ready for the domestic market initially, as COVID restrictions ease, and for the international market eventually. Five enterprises were selected by an expert panel. Each enterprise received a small grant to further support market readiness.  |
| --- |