



Ministry of Agriculture Newsletter

November—December 2018

Biosecurity Summit

IN THIS ISSUE

- ⇒ [Biosecurity Summit](#)
- ⇒ [Weed Bio-control Programme](#)
- ⇒ [Mauke Crop Bank](#)
- ⇒ [ArcGIS Training](#)
- ⇒ [School Gardening Program](#)
- ⇒ [Other Activities](#)

The first ever Biosecurity Summit was held in November 2018 with Agriculture Managers and Biosecurity officers from the Pa Enua of Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia, Mauke, Mitiaro attending the Summit. The Mayor and Executive Officers from Aitutaki, Mauke and Mitiaro also attended.

The main objective of the summit was to strengthen and familiarize the Pa Enua Biosecurity officers on strategic areas in delivering biosecurity operations in the Pa Enua. The one week training covered various areas in Biosecurity such as the Biosecurity Act 2008, Procedural manual, vessel & aircraft clearance, import, export, inspection requirements and movements of plants and plant products between Islands. The summit was considered a success due to much interaction and learning between participants and Agriculture staff.



Participants to the Biosecurity summit with Hon. Vainetutai Rose Brown, Minister for Agriculture and Ms. Temarama Anguna, Secretary of Agriculture.

Weed Bio-control Programme

The Biological Control Programme of Environmental Important Weeds in the Cook Islands was funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

The main research was carried out by staff of the Biodiversity and Conservation Unit of Landcare Research, New Zealand with the help of Dr. Maja Poschko, Entomologist and nursery staff of the Ministry of Agriculture.

As a follow up to the programme a "Weed Bio-control training workshop" was held at the Ministry of Agriculture, Arorangi, from the 7th to 8th of November 2018. The aim of the workshop was to train staff from various agencies, Agriculture, National Environment Services and Te Ipukarea Society (NGO) on how to monitor the impacts of weed bio-control agents.

Joining the training program were 4 staff from Vanuatu's Biosecurity office. Vanuatu has a new MFAT funded project to control pasture weeds in Vanuatu and the officers attended to observe the results of a recent bio-control programme in the Cook Islands and meet key local contacts.



As part of the workshop, the participants took part in field trips to see first hand on how the released bio-agents work. The weeds found to be attacked by their natural enemies were Red passion fruit vine (*Passiflora rubra*), Cocklebur (*Xanthium pungens*), Strawberry guava (*Psidium cattleianum*), mile-a minute (*Mikania micrantha*), balloon vine (*Cardiospermum grandiflorum*) and African tulip trees (*Spathodea campanulata*).

Due to the success of the Bio-control program, a proposed extension of the project is likely to be approved and we envisage that the Pa Enua will be included.



Red passion fruit vine
(*Passiflora rubra*)



Strawberry guava
(*Psidium cattleianum*)



Mile-a minute
(*Mikania micrantha*)



Balloon vine
(*Cardiospermum grandiflorum*)



Cocklebur
(*Xanthium pungens*)

**Examples of Weeds
released in Rarotonga**



African tulip trees
(*Spathodea campanulata*)

Mauke Crop Bank

The first phase of the Crop Bank (also known as a gene bank) in Mauke has now been completed. Agriculture staff on Mauke were assisted by Tavake Manuel Karika and Edwin Apera in fencing the area where all the planting materials will be held. This program is supported by Ridge to Reef (R2R) in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mauke is the second island to have a crop bank established. The first was Atiu, which is now in its second phase of collecting planting materials to be housed in the crop bank. Following Mauke, a similar program will be carried out in Mitiaro, Mangaia and Aitutaki.

We thank Tavake and Edwin for assisting our Mauke colleagues with the establishment of their crop bank.



Mauke Agriculture staff and MoA Staff



Identified site on Mauke



Staff working on the Chain link fence and post



Land Clearance

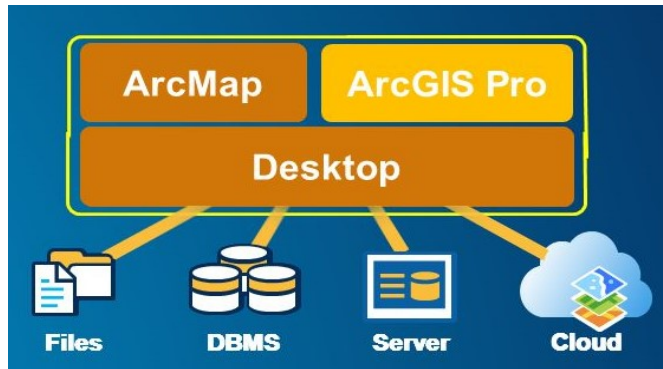


The purpose of the crop bank is:

- To mass produce traditional crops and gain additional planting materials to be distributed to the people of Mauke;
- To produce and share new varieties that are resistant to heat stress, water log, pests and diseases and salt residence;
- To grow coconut seeds from the selection and identification of improved varieties important to the island;
- To provide a land facility for training our growers and school children on best agricultural planting practices;
- To provide a secure site to grow crops and planting materials in preparation for the cyclone season.

ArcGIS Pro Training

Emergency Management Cook Islands conducted a Geographical Information System (GIS) training from the 19 to 30th November 2018. The purpose of the training was to enable Geographical Information System (GIS) software and ArcGIS Pro to be used in the workplace. Staff would learn how to access, input and analyze data. for their purpose.



The two week training program was attended by Puna Kamoe and Aru Parima from the Ministry. Topics included the basic use of different tools of the program: Essential workflow, Optimizing Field operations, Spatial Analyzing and Deploying Multiuser Geodatabase. The training was carried out in partnership with Eagle Technology Group Ltd.

School Program

Senior Advisory officer Brian Tairea has been assisting various schools on the island setting up school gardens. This is a joint program between the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education and non-government organization group Te KoRero o te Orau.

Schools involved are Apii Nikao with a school roll of 170 students between the ages of 8 to 12 years old who are interested in Agriculture. Apii Avarua also has a roll of 120 students from the ages of 4 to 8 year olds.

The Ministry assists with the supply of vegetable seedlings (Pak choy, cucumber, beans and silver beet) as well as classroom teaching plans relating to Agriculture.

This program is to establish a foundation of knowledge in agriculture for our young children and students prior to them entering secondary school. This also contributes to awareness about planting and eating healthy foods and living healthy lifestyles and thereby



Photo credit: Te Korero o te Orau



Brian with primary school students

“Lets Make Taro Great Again!”

Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Taro Research Expedition

The Ministry hosted a visit by an SPC delegation from the 09th to 15th December for the purposes of collating impact stories on taro sent to the Cook Islands by SPC CePaCT and meet with staff and visit selected farm and gene banks. The delegation was made up of Mr. Michel Ghanem, Ms Sefra Levin and Ms Elenoa Shishkova.

In a nutshell, Sefra sent an email summing up their visit...

“There are rare experiences in life that cannot be quantified or ever fully expressed through words- they can only be lived. This past week has been an expedition I can hopefully tell my grandchildren about. What an honor to wander through taro paddies in the high valleys of Rarotonga with Celine (and her niece) - she is a brilliant naturalist whom caretakes the land & inspires all around her with her actions - she is a force of goodness that may lead the children’s hands back to the dirt.

Dr. Rongo and his dedication to the environment and the children was very inspirational. It is important to understand the wonderful efforts he is championing (I wish him luck in the elections).

It was fantastic to hear about Maara’s production on Atiu and understand how he has been utilizing Ce-PaCT materials.

It was very informative to listen to Nooroa & Casper- the wise sages who speak of their craft as poets and bards - the keepers of a wisdom & art that takes such strength & dedication. They are an inspiration to the tides of laziness sweeping over the generations. It was beautiful to understand the reverence they hold for the moon and the tides and the ancestors whose footprints can be felt in the same mud...Jackson (am I saying his name correctly?) - was a joyful visionary bursting with energy, innovation and insight. His closed looped regenerative systems can pave the way for a productive agrarian style based on a harmony with the ecosystem he stewards.

To Moe & Nga- I am very grateful for their ceaseless dedication to the taro and their generosity of time and knowledge. I am very happy they are official members of the Taro expedition.

Thank you to Puna, Grace, Brain, Edward & all the wonderful staff at the Ministry of Agriculture for all their help during our stay.

To Temarama Anguna for taking the time to meet with us twice and her support of our efforts and all the phenomenal work she does for The Cooks.

I already miss eating Taro and still can’t believe how delicious the dishes were that you had flown in from the yummiest of taro patches from these bountiful surrounding islands- it made my heart melt with the goodness of each bite !

Thank you Michel, Elena and William for all of your support on the “Trail of Taro.”

I am excited for all the work ahead to create papers and videos using this content to show the world the great work done on The Cooks, and the vital importance of plant genetic resource sharing for this vital and delicious staple crop.

Let’s Make Taro Great Again!

Regards,

Sefra Alexandra - The Seed Huntress

As Head of Ministry, I also extend my gratitude to our MOA team for the assistance, support and hospitality accorded to the SPC delegation.

Great work team!



Other Activities

Renovations

The Ministry underwent some renovations in their office building. The Biosecurity and Policy & Planning office was extended to provide better working space for the staff. A receptionist area was constructed and the conference room also underwent a transformation with a separating wall removed. Staff decided on paint colour and work commenced. Once completed, Blue Sky moved in to re-wire the phone connections. We thank CIIC and Siteworx for funding and carrying out the renovations.

We now look forward to the installation of air conditioners in the office.

Tereora College Prize Giving

The Ministry attended the Tereora College Prize-giving held at the National Auditorium. The Minister of Agriculture sponsored 2 trophies for Excellence in Horticulture studies for Year 12 and 13.

We acknowledge Brian Tairea and his family for their ongoing support with sponsorship to the College students for studies in Horticulture.



Ministry Xmas Party 2018

The Ministry's Xmas party was held on the 7th December 2018 in Panther land. Attended by the majority of staff and family, we witnessed Maya in a dress, participated in Secret Santa gifts and enjoyed a "huge kaikai". As the night wore on, it became apparent that we have staff with a multitude of talents especially with singing...as witnessed by the remaining few...

Thank you to all staff who attended and contributed towards Secret Santa and the kaikai.

Merry Christmas and a Safe New Year. See you all back in 2019!!

