

Ministry of Agriculture



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AGRICULTURE SECTOR RESPONSE PACKAGE

COVID-19

COVID-19 has placed the Cook Islands in “unprecedented times”. To sustain the agriculture sector and maintain food security for all people living in the Cook Islands, an Agriculture sector response package was formulated.

The Ministry of Agriculture would purchase seeds, trays, seed raising mix and fertiliser. The Ministry will sow the seeds and distribute from its nursery to growers, free of charge, to assist with their planting programs. The ultimate aim is to provide seedlings to farmers for free so that sufficient vegetable produce can be grown for harvest over the next 3 to 6 months. Seedlings will also be provided to households to commence or maintain a home garden.

This came into effect on Monday 06 April 2020.

This package is also extended to the Pa Enua.

The Ministry received an overwhelming response from the public to this package. As of 30 April 2020, the nursery had distributed 2,160 pak choy; 504 eggplants, Chinese cabbage 3,948, 3,312 tsoi sum; 1,020 cucumber, 2,460 seed corn and 1,640 bean seedlings.

Further support has been extended to full and part time commercial growers for tractor services to cultivate suitable plots of land – up to half an acre. The land would be inspected by Agriculture staff for suitability. To date, 9 semi commercial farmers have taken advantage of this tractor service support.

The Ministry’s sector response package will end on 30 June 2020.



Nursery technicians Teariki Turua and Iriea Tangapiri preparing seedlings for distribution.

SHADES OF THE SOUR SWEET PAST

On 22 April, Ministry staff undertook a tour of a Citrus plantation in the village of Titikaveka.

Two decades ago when the Cook Islands was exporting citrus to the Australia and New Zealand markets, this citrus plantation was famous for agro-tourism.



Today, exports have ceased, but this land still holds 2,400 orange trees that supply to meet local demand.

Maintenance is a major challenge for this plantation. On a quarterly basis, one tree needs 6-8kg of fertilizer which costs about \$15 per tree.

In addition, the citrus rust mite is also a challenge. Rust mites are normally controlled by using organic neem oil. Thankfully, the damage done by rust mites are confined to the rind/skin whereby turning them to a dull or brown colour, but not affecting the fruit or the taste.



WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER!

When the Prime Minister declared the lifting of some restrictions from the COVID-19 Code Yellow situation, a staff meeting was conducted on Friday 24 April 2020. The objective of the meeting was to re-start the Ministry's normal work program and discuss possible options or projects for a long term recovery plan for the Ministry and the agriculture sector.

The meeting included a further development, where instead of the Secretary taking the lead, staff from each division were requested to do a presentation of their areas of responsibility.

Senior Biosecurity Officer Piriariki Maaō started the presentations. He presented on the Biosecurity divisions plan of a long term vision and possible exports for the agriculture sector (non fruit fly host materials—coconut, maire, vanilla, honey, taro)

As part of his presentation, he alluded to the divisions revenue stream and work schedule being affected due to COVID-19 international border closures.



Biosecurity Division—Piriariki Maaō presenting to staff

Representing Crop Research division was Crop Technicians Iriea Tangapiri, Teariki Turua and Victor Mataora.

Iriea stole the show with her pictorial presentation! Iriea also provided data on the amount of seedlings distributed to the general public from the nursery. Victor provided his views on the implementation of the Agriculture Response package of what went well and areas for improvement. Teariki provided feedback on the site visits he carried out to the new home gardeners.

The smallest division of the Ministry, the Advisory division provided a snapshot of their tasks and activities pertaining to Livestock, bee-keeping, the school program and the PEARL project.

The Corporate Services division together with the Secretary were the last presenters of the meeting.

Awareness around staff appraisals, the Ministry's disaster recovery plan and a finance update was done.

The meeting concluded with a BBQ lunch for all staff.

A HUGE Meitaki Ma'ata to all presenters, staff and chefs for organizing and preparing a fabulous lunch!

Kia Rangatira te Pae Tanu!



MOA Staff listening to the presentation.

MINISTER MEETS WITH COMMERCIAL FARMERS

On Wednesday 22 April, the main commercial farmers of the Cook Islands came together to meet the Minister of Agriculture Hon. Vainetu-tai Rose Brown.

The meeting was organized for the growers to share their views about how the agriculture sector could further contribute to the recovery of the economy following COVID-19, how the Ministry could assist them and their views of the Ministry's new Agriculture Sector Action Plan 2020-2025.



Farmers expressed their concerns with the cost of agriculture inputs (fertilizer, pesticides, labour, machinery).

They proposed that the BTIB soft loan scheme be increased, grace period initiated and a

checking account be part of the scheme.

Talk also focused on increasing local production to reduce imports.

ABIU — I DARE YOU TO TRY!

Round to oval, bright yellow in colour with a pointed end - you would consider yourself lucky to sight this fruit in the market. This particular fruit is called **"Abiu"**.

This fruit was first introduced in 1999 (1 variety) and then re-introduced in 2005 (2 varieties) by the Director Crop Research — William Wigmore and Senior Crop Technician Nga Maireroa from Australia.

Abiu is fairly unknown in the Cook Islands. It is a seasonal fruit and is harvested during March to May only. There are only about twenty trees of this fruit on the island, further contributing to its secrecy.



For the palate, Abiu has a creamy delicate white flesh with a hint of vanilla taste. Abiu goes well with ice cream or yogurt.

Abiu has a high source of vitamin A & C, calcium and phosphorus, very good for the body.

So next time you see Abiu at the market, try it!

WALKING A FINE LINE ON EGGS

On 30 April, the Biosecurity division met with Te Marae Ora Public Health team to discuss possible actions against eggs sold by retailers past their “best before date”.

The understanding is that goods that are past their “best before date” are still safe to consume; a Best Before date is merely an indication of when the goods should be consumed by if you want to eat it at its best quality. A ‘Use By’ or ‘Expiry’ date means the goods are not suitable for sale or consumption.

The discussion revolved around when these eggs should be removed from the shelves and the roles of the two Ministries in resolving this issue.



WHAT IS AFRICAN SWINE FLU (ASF)?



African swine fever (ASF) is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild pigs.

ASF virus can survive for a period of time in fresh, frozen, uncooked and partially cooked/processed pork products.

Being proactive, the Ministry's Biosecurity division met the Customs team to strengthen its processes on the importation of pork products (Chilled, Frozen & Canned/Processed) from the Asia countries — China, Philippines, Indonesia, Italy, Spain and Samoa.

As an outcome and in partnership with importers, the division removed 16 cartons of pork products from sale and later destroyed. The Ministry also placed a suspension

on all pork products from the listed countries effective 16 April 2020.

FALL ARMY WORM FACTSHEET— SPODOPTERA

The Fall Armyworm is in fact not a worm, but a caterpillar in its larval stage. It will then turn into a brown moth with a wing-span of approximately 4cm. The name comes from the way the larvae gather together in large numbers on leaves when feeding. They can be easily spotted in small crops while doing this.

CROPS AT RISK			
VEGETABLES	GRASS/CEREAL	ROOT CROPS	FRUITS
Corn	Sugarcane	Taro	Oranges
Sweetcorn	Sorghum		Pawpaw
Broccoli			
Head cabbage			
Bok choy			

Fall Armyworms are also known to attack more than 350 species of plants including ornamentals and weeds.

PREVENTION/MANAGEMENT		
NATURAL PREDATOR	ORGANIC PESTICIDE	DISPOSAL
Parasitic wasp	Dipel	Pick infected leaves & dispose in fire
Ladybird beetle	Neem	
Hoover flies	Match	
Earwigs		
Birds		



Adult brown moth



Fall Army Worm

INTERESTING FACTS ON MORINGA—DRUMSTICK

Are you aware of the health benefits of Moringa / Drumstick?

Moringa is a rare plant whose leaves, roots, bark, seeds, pods and stems are all edible.

Moringa is a popular food delicacy and provides medicinal health benefits commonly used by Asians.

Eating the moringa plant contributes to improved blood circulation, respiratory disorders, digestive system, breast milk production and stronger bones.

The pods or the drumstick of the plant, is known to enhance sexual health.



A NURSERY BUILT FOR TODAY!

The Ministry is extremely grateful for the assistance provided by the Ministry of Finance Economic Planning team for including the funding for the refurbishment of our nurseries into the 2019-2020 supplementary budget.

The Ministry's current nurseries were built in the late 1990's and are now due for an overhaul. The Ministry secured the services of master builder Robert Tuoro to complete the project.

It is anticipated that the two nurseries and plant preparation area will be completed by July 2020.

The upgrade includes a remodel of the current nurseries, the inclusion of an automatic water sprinkler system and seedling preparation area.

We look forward to the completion of this project as we continue to support our farmers with their planting programs.



HANDOVER OF ATIU AGRICULTURE NURSERY



The Atiu Agriculture Nursery was officially handed over to the Atiu Agriculture department on Friday 29 May 2020 by the Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Rose Toki Brown. Attended by the Minister of Agriculture, Minister of BTIB Hon. George Angene, Minister of Internal Affairs Hon. Vaine (Mac) Mokoroa, the Member of Parliament Hon. Tehani Brown, the Secretary of Agriculture Mrs Temarama Anguna-Kamana, the Secretary of Culture Mr Anthony Turua, MOA PEARL Project Coordinator Mr Takili Tairi and representatives from BTIB and FSC.



The nursery was a culmination of effort between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Atiu Island Council, the Executive officer and the Atiu Agriculture Department. Congratulations Atiu!

HANDOVER OF MAUKE AGRICULTURE NURSERY

The Mauke Agriculture Nursery was officially handed over to the Mauke Agriculture department on Friday 05 June 2020 by the Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Rose Toki Brown. Attended by the Minister of Agriculture, Minister of Internal Affairs Hon. Vaine (Mac) Mokoroa, the Member of Parliament Hon. Tai Tura, the Secretary of Agriculture Mrs Temarama Anguna-Kamana, the Secretary of Culture Mr Anthony Turua, MFEM DCD Director Mani Mate and MOA PEARL Project Coordinator Mr Takili Tairi.

Similar to the Atiu nursery, the new Mauke nursery was a joint effort between the Ministry of Agriculture, Mauke Island Council, Island Administration and the Mauke Agriculture Department. Congratulations Mauke and thank you PEARL project!

