

## CAFF strengthens partnership with Spices of Fiji Limited



FNU Dean CAFF Professor Paul Iji (left) with Spices of Fiji Limited's Operations Manager Veronica Hazelman and Director, George Hazelman after the MOU signing.

Fiji National University's (FNU), College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) yesterday with Spices of Fiji Limited to enhance scientific, technological and educational collaboration. Spices of Fiji Ltd is an organically certified farm located at in Wainadoi, Navua which produces a range of products that include pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, cardamom, turmeric, ginger and vanilla.

CAFF Dean Professor Paul Iji said the partnership highlighted the University's commitment to working with the industry in the process of gaining mutual benefits. The senior academic said students will also have an opportunity to work and assist with real-time issues in the agricultural sector.

"Through this MOU, we agree to encourage and promote the exchange of ideas, expertise and knowledge, facilitate staff and student exchange, collaborate on research programmes on farms, various supply chains and product development and the development of programmes," Professor Iji said.

"For FNU programmes like our postgraduate courses in Agriculture that we will offer soon, this is beneficial to our stakeholders such as Spices of Fiji Limited because of the issues you face in the farm could be investigated and addressed through these programmes."

"For us at the College, we value this and we are here to contribute to the development of agriculture so we value our relationship with all stakeholders in the industry."

Under the partnership, the College will provide expert advice when needed, cooperate and collaborate in any research work carried out by the spice farm and facilitate the industrial attachment of students at the farm.

Spices of Fiji Limited, on the other hand, will provide industry advice, cooperate in research work, contribute to the development of relevant programmes and share information and materials where appropriate.

Spices of Fiji Limited director, George Hazelman said the spice farm also helped communities in the area by purchasing spices from the villagers and processing, packaging and marketing the products locally and for export.

"We're trying to fix the age-old issue of people leaving their villages for what they think is a 'better' life in the city," Hazelman said. "We keep talking about why they leave their villages but we don't talk about how we can keep them in their villages. I believe spices could be an answer to that problem."

"It is a low volume but high-value commodity that is used everywhere every day."

"And now with this MoU, if we have issues with our spices we can work with FNU and the assistance they give us we can also pass down to these farmers as well."

"Having students here on practical will also be beneficial as they will see first-hand the operations of a spice farm. Students doing their research will also help us with the problems we face and we will be able to find solutions going forward."

The MoU is for a term of five years, with the possibility of extension through mutual agreement.



FNU Dean CAFF Prof Paul Iji (third right) and CAFF academic staff listen attentively during a tour of the spice farm by its Operations Manager, Veronica Hazelman.