

FNU and Ministry of Agriculture discuss areas of collaboration



Fiji National University (FNU), College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) Dean Professor Paul Iji (third from left) officially exchange a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Ministry of Agriculture Permanent Secretary David Kolutagane whilst FNU academic staff look on.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Rural and Maritime Development, Waterways and Environment plans to adopt a model that would enable Government to support key research being conducted by the Fiji National University's (FNU) College of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (CAFF) staff and students.

The Ministry's Permanent Secretary, David Kolutagane, shared this with CAFF Dean, Professor Paul Iji and fellow staff during a visit to Koronivia Campus recently. PS Kolutagane also handed over an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed earlier this year to increase collaboration between the Ministry and CAFF. He said this model would assist in the commercial applications of the research findings.

CAFF Dean, Professor Paul Iji supported this idea and said a similar cooperative research scheme was run by the Australian Government. Professor Iji said the global animal industry also funded university research projects in this manner.

"I also highlighted the need to create joint research groups, comprising researchers from the Ministry, FNU and the University of the South Pacific to investigate specific research problems in the area of agriculture," Professor Iji said.

"The Permanent Secretary and I have charged the CAFF Associate Dean (Research), Dr Champathi Gunathilake, to work with the research staff at Koronivia Research Station to develop potential research groups, to be presented to the Ministry and the College."

"We are also helping the Ministry develop a global editorial board for the Fiji Agricultural Journal and have had discussions with the Editor-in-Chief, Dr Apaitia Macanawai, to launch the journal online and widen the scope of the journal to attract more research publications."

"The PS suggested that the Editor-in-Chief and I propose timelines over which the journal will be re-developed, so that it could be budgeted." Professor Iji said he was assured by the Permanent Secretary that the Ministry would be willing to expand collaboration in all areas of research and related activities.

"He informed the College team of the plans by the Ministry to adopt commodity and regional strategies to reform agriculture in Fiji, stressing that all recommendations and actions will be evidence-based," Professor Iji said.

"I also assured the PS that the College would help the Ministry review the ongoing operations at the Yaqara Pastoral Facility in the Western Division, with a view of making it more viable."

"He was of the view that if the Yaqara property was fully functional, it would save the country a considerable amount of money in meat and other protein imports."

Professor Iji also requested if more land could be provided to CAFF for research, in view of loss of some parts of the College's Crop Farm due to the ongoing redevelopment of King's Road and the road to Toga Village.