

Climbing the value chain in the Fiji ginger industry

At the Qere Mai Lagi ginger farm in Fiji, the future is looking bright.

Through his association with the United Kingdom Trade Partnership (UKTP) Programme in Fiji, Ifereimi Vasu and Jason Zhong are part of an industry-wide revival in the ginger sector bringing new jobs, higher productivity and increased incomes across the entire agricultural value-chain.

Since 2019, the UKTP Programme has worked with African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to increase exports to the United Kingdom and the European Union through the better use of Economic Partnership Agreements.

The programme identified untapped potential in Fiji's ginger industry, including for value-added products such as crystallised ginger and ginger syrup. From the farmers to the factory workers to the financiers, at the heart of this programme is an approach which seeks to identify, connect, and support all actors along the value-chain. The value-chain model starts with farmers like Ifereimi and Jason, their families, and rural communities.

Through site selection, land preparation works, individual farm visits by the programme team and support from the Ministry of Agriculture, over 150 new farms were selected for financial assistance through the Fiji Development Bank over a two-year period. Rural training kits were distributed and over 100 loan applications targeting smallholder farmers were lodged leading to over \$1 million dollars of loans to ginger farmers being approved by the bank last year.

Despite two cyclonic seasons, farm yields have increased and the production factory is buzzing as the reputation for quality Fiji ginger products gathers momentum.

For the ginger industry to grow and be sustainable, it had to deliver benefits across all parts of the community. This was an important design element of the programme. The ginger sector provides employment for Fijians beyond the farm gate, with ginger processing employing more than 230 people, 75 per cent of whom are women.

The Senior Agriculture Extension Officer for the UKTP Fiji programme, Ms Mereseini Naivola, said:

Inviting both men and women to participate in UKTP training activities has resulted in men and women being seen working side-by-side on ginger farms. This has become a more socially acceptable practice across the ginger industry.

Up to 570 seasonal labourers have been provided with more regular and

continuous work due to the larger production volumes and the model has supported farmers living with disabilities. For farmers not able to join training sessions in person, UKTP has developed 16 instructional videos which could be viewed on smart phones through the mobile network.

The British High Commissioner to Fiji, Dr Brian Jones, said:

It was great meeting Ifereimi and Jason, hearing their passion for ginger farming and recognise the skill and competence they have built. Many people I've met in Fiji so far have told me about the potential of ginger farming and export, and I am so happy the UK is engaging in such a promising sector. There is more to be done supporting the farmers and Fiji get the best price for their world-class ginger, and I look forward to the results this year will bring.

As the world is opening up again from the global pandemic, the agro-value chain model is having genuine success in Fiji.

The consolidated income generated by ginger farmers in the UKTP programme has increased threefold since the programme started.

The farm-gate price for ginger is up by 60 per cent, so farmers, producers and the financiers are all celebrating.

And with new Fiji ginger products being sold in markets across the UK, Europe and Australia, the outlook for passionate ginger farmers such as Ifereimi and Jason is looking very bright indeed.