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PWAF pledges to transform Pacific agriculture/forestry sectors through R&D alliances

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The Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry (PWAF) was recently held in Nadi, Fiji in presence of Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) members. The PWAF was a valuable opportunity for ACIAR to discuss topics with Pacific partners on transforming Pacific agriculture and forestry sectors through research partnerships to achieve a more resilient and sustainable region. The PWAF event series provides an opportunity for Pacific member countries to drive the conversation and guide partners working with the region on their goals and work priorities for the following 2 years.

The Fiji Government hosted these meeting with support from SPC and the FAO. The third Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and The Pacific Community (SPC) Joint Agriculture and Forestry Ministerial Meeting was also held. SPC and the Australian Government, including ACIAR, CSIRO, DAFF and DFAT hosted the event.

Pacific food systems were the topic of the side event, which aimed to advance the conversation. Traditionally and fundamentally, Pacific food systems rely on agriculture and fisheries (coastal food systems), but are all-encompassing and include processing, trade, and consumption as well. Thus, the agricultural and forestry sectors have played a crucial role in the transformation of Pacific Island food systems.

A number of common themes emerged throughout the discussion of Pacific food systems. The panelist emphasized that to improve nutritional outcomes, the most prominent component is systems thinking. This involves looking at the bigger picture and linking the agricultural sector, health, and education. The panelist found it essential to have useful, relevant, and easily accessible data for decision-making and influencing behavioral and community changes regarding improved nutritional choices. Data collection related to food systems should also include gender and social issues.Â Â

Group topics for the workshop were drawn from Pacific Island national pathways and represented common goals and high-level actions articulated across multiple pathways.

The following topics were discussed across the groups:

- Nutrition: Improving access, affordability, and consumption of healthy local foods
- Blue-green sustainability: Increasing the sustainability of blue and green food production/harvesting and the links between them
- Value-adding: Encouraging value-adding to local products to reduce imports and grow exports
- Resilience: Using traditional knowledge and nature-positive production to improve resilience to shocks and stressors
- Governance: Aligning and coordinating across government entities to govern food systems links and relationships

Discussions within the group focused on the theme â??value-adding: encouraging local product value-adding to reduce input costs and increase exports.â?• This discussion focused on what was working well, any important connections relating to this part of the network, and possible solutions. A number of important connections were made between the food system and other systems, including tourism, education, transportation, and research. These included processing, production, and distribution, food policy and environment, as well as technology. In this context, solutions could include switching from main production to processing, resulting in value-add within the country, rather than exporting raw materials. In order to facilitate this, the policy could be linked to logistics, labor, business environment, and other socioeconomic factors to accommodate this increase in processing.

The event fostered the relationships between countries and organizations, including SPC and Australia. It was also an excellent opportunity to facilitate the exchange of ideas and thoughts among a number of nations about food systems.