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PRESS RELEASE

FSC Demonstrates Mechanisation Technologies to Empower Growers

Lautoka, Fiji - The Fiji Sugar Corporation Limited (FSC) is taking a significant step forward in developing the sugar industry with its pioneering implementation of mechanisation technologies. The FSC's field team has recently embarked on a mission to showcase the potential of Mechanical Planters and Fertilizer Applicators to sugar cane growers in various sectors.

These mechanisation technologies promise to empower sugar cane farmers by providing start-to-end crop life cycle mechanisation solutions to long-standing industry challenges, including labour paucity and costs and the time-intensive nature of land preparation and manual planting. The demonstrations have generated considerable enthusiasm within the farming community as growers and industry experts anticipate the transformative impact of these advancements.

Kinisalote Qene, a grower from the Malolo sector, expressed her enthusiasm after witnessing the performance of these machines during the demonstrations. She confessed that the challenge of finding labourers for sugarcane farming, even for planting, weedicide and fertiliser application, had weighed heavily on her plans to start planting next year.

"The persistent struggle to find labourers willing to work in sugarcane fields had been a significant concern for me and many other growers. Implementing mechanization for all cultivation activities is a game-changer, offering a feasible solution to the chronic labour shortage issue and the promise of significant cost reduction. During the demonstration, the other five female growers echoed that machines will solve our labour problem while reducing costs," Qene stated.

Sanjay Nadan, a farmer from Qeleloa, shared a similar sentiment, emphasising how mechanisation significantly reduces the time, labour, and costs associated with sugarcane farming.

"It's a relief that we are heading towards mechanization in sugarcane farming. It is so difficult to find labourers to work on our farms. These machines will reduce our costs as well," he said.

FSC Chief Executive Officer Bhan Pratap Singh said that the 2023-2024 budget includes a substantial allocation of \$500,000 under the Farm Mechanisation Program for the first time, emphasising the government's vision to validate, introduce, and promote innovative mechanisation solutions catering to the diverse needs and terrains within the sector.

Lakshman Jayaraman, FSC's Head of Agriculture, highlighted the limited capacity of existing mechanisation services, which cannot effectively serve all growers and all activities. The launch of this initiative seeks to empower farmers, cooperatives, and service providers to invest in the development and expansion of mechanization solutions tailored to their specific requirements and geographical suitability.

"The planter does the work of opening the drill, cutting the seed, fertilizer application and covering up with soil and compaction all in one go. The planter will enable straight-line planting for mechanical harvest and planting immediately upon receiving rain. 5-6 acres can be planted in a single day. The fertilizer applicator cuts the trash, rips the compacted soil close to the stumps, applies fertilizer at the root zone and covers the soil in one go. This will enable the correct fertiliser application method and prevent fertiliser volatilization and leaching losses, thereby increasing crop productivity," stated Jayaraman.

The Ministry of Sugar Industry (MoSI) will soon invite expressions of interest (EOI) and subsequently select beneficiaries, following a thorough evaluation of specific terms and conditions detailed in the grant proposal. This groundbreaking proposal aims to provide crucial farming implements at a 50 percent subsidy to tractor service providers registered with the FSC.

The plan is to strategically provide 10-12 planters and 30-40 fertilizer applicators across three mills in the current financial year. This distribution strategy ensures an extensive reach across various sectors, effectively meeting the diverse needs of farmers.

FSC's bold step towards a complete mechanisation solution promises to revolutionise the sugar industry, offering growers the tools they need to overcome long-standing challenges and embrace a more sustainable and efficient future.

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