

## Case Study: Sustainable farming enhancing the tourist experience on Vanuatu's largest island

*New DFAT Funded Farm to Table initiative is facilitating linkages between farms and restaurants, while simultaneously upskilling farmers and chefs refining local cuisine for visitors.*

On Espiritu Santo Island, a lush tropical island encased by bright blue waters, visitors can be forgiven for questioning the scarcity of fresh local ingredients available on the menu. As a Pacific Island where rice has replaced traditional starch staples, and canned meats replace local game, Santo is determined to make a name for itself as *the* destination for fresh local Vanuatu food.

Leading the campaign is the Farm to Table initiative of the Skills for Agribusiness program with the Department of Agriculture along with Skills for Tourism and the Department of Tourism as part of the DFAT funded Vanuatu Skills Partnership. The joint initiative is capitalising on Santo's comparative advantage. Being Vanuatu's largest island, having a number of local farmers, naturally fertile ground, sufficient rainfall and home to Vanuatu's second international airport connecting local produce to tourist markets makes sense.

In April this year the program has planted the seeds for beginning with skills activities aimed at strengthening small scale farms and local restaurants. The first activity provided farmers with techniques and best practices to improve operations. Along with establishing a production calendar, farmers learned about product diversification, meeting demand and product specification while improving husbandry practices. Focusing on root crops, fruits and vegetables, Farm to Table is looking to progress to livestock later this year.



*Image: Broccoli plot*

Following the farm activity, an international chef from NEOFOOD organisation in New Caledonia in collaboration with two local chefs developed local recipe guides based on products supplied by 12 key farmers. The work stream 'Beneficial Recipe' then worked on upskilling chefs on mastering the recipes to high standards meeting international tourist expectations. Thus far 42 chefs from 19 restaurants and island bungalows from rural and urban establishments have completed this part of the work stream.

The main event was bringing together farmers, chefs and international tourists to try the newly created recipes. With farmers having a taste of how their products were prepared in a way they could not have imagined, they now understand the benefit of linking their product with restaurants. The tourist tasting panel empowered local businesses exclaiming 'we want to eat Vanuatu!' at the end of their meals. Following the meal a clear commitment to the venture from farmers and chefs was realised.



*Image: New recipes created during the training*

Bringing farmers and buyers together enabled conversations on trading challenges. While restaurateurs outlined their needs for quality, fair priced produce, farmers presented their barriers including viable seed supply, transport, product pricing and market negotiation. Farmers outlined their costs of helping buyers to understand the economics of small scale farms. Farmers have already indicated positive economic benefits from the activities with one farmer reporting:

*It also offers us new market avenues. We now understand further the importance of producing and supplying what tourism business houses and restaurants need from us, and we believe that our coaches will assist us technically to plan our work better to provide more choice in the market in terms of product diversification.*

The initiative has also provided economic benefit for restaurateurs who were in the practice of procuring imported food items. After attending the training Suzanne from Sanma Club Restaurant was surprised at the cost benefit: “I found that creating new recipes is economic, for example, we used 3 water taros to feed 30 people (laugh)...I could not believe that!”

Vanuatu, similar to other Pacific nations is facing the burden of food security, micronutrient deficiencies as well as an increase in adult obesity, diabetes, heart disease and non-communicable disease. (NCD accounts for 75% of death in the Pacific and Vanuatu is in the top 10 countries with highest rate of NCDs). The initiative is contributing to the economy and supporting much needed education on food consumption practices where canned food is a popular meal option at home. One client reported introducing fresh produce at home:

*I can provide beneficial food and dishes to my children and family at home instead of boiling root crops as usual with a canned meat. I now know that I can always liaise with farmers club for my farm ingredients.*

As the Farm to Table initiative continues to improve small scale farming practices and product offerings at restaurants, it will influence healthy consumption behaviours while making Espiritu Santo a more attractive destination. Clients are motivated to work together in business to business food distribution while strengthening the economic viability of their respective businesses. Menus across Espiritu Santo are changing with more local cuisine being promoted across establishments including popular destinations such as Port Olry and Champagne Beach. The agriculture and tourism industries focus on creating *the* ideal destination for delicious fresh local Vanuatu food is coming to fruition.