

MEDIA RELEASE

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Retired school teacher reignites her farming passion

For 66 year old retired school teacher Pushpa Wati Narayan, sugar cane farming was something that growing up was intertwined with her life, from early childhood till now. Her father was a sugar cane farmer and so too was her grandfather. Sugar cane farming has been for her, a generational passion.

“This is a land where I have lived and toiled since my birth”, said Narayan. Referring to her 16 and $\frac{3}{4}$ acre sugar cane farm in Korovutu, just 5 minutes from the main Ba town area. She inherited the sugar cane farm from her mother and since 1972, she has been actively working on the farm.

Of the total land area, 15 acres is dedicated to sugar cane. She has been fortunate over the years as her area is not prone to flooding. Although the area does get affected by drought during the dry season.



Above: Pushpa Nayaran points out to one of her new pieces of rejuvenated land now planted with sugar cane

She left farming for some years to focus on her teaching career and growing her little family. “I got married in 1979 and we moved away from the farm to teach for some years”, Narayan adds. This all changed when in 1983, upon her father’s passing, they had to return to farm the land. They continued farming until 2004, when her husband passed away.

The sugar cane farm used to produce around 700 tonnes of cane, during the time her dad was farming the land. When the farm was last actively producing, the tonnage had dropped to around 300 tonnes annually.

“When my husband died, running the farm became a bit of a challenge for me”, she said. So the farm was left idle for a number of years until the resurgence in sugar cane farming, largely driven by the incentives put in place by the Government. This reignited a spark in her to see if she could resuscitate her dying sugar cane farm.

“I made several attempts to start-up on my own, I hired labourers from around here to come and work on the farm. But it was not good, their work was not good”, Narayan said.

Right: An FSC tractor busy at work rotavating a section of Narayan’s sugar cane farm



In 2018, during the government ministerial consultations around the sugar cane belt which she attended, she raised her grievances and her desire to start-up her sugar cane farm again. And she was delighted when FSC responded to her pleas and came to her assistance.

“I had a very overgrown farm, so FSC came in and removed the overgrown shrubs and wild grass, they levelled it up and I was just very happy with what they did”, a grateful Narayan said

Today the sugar cane farm is a stark contrast to what it was a year ago and it has become a show-piece for the neighbouring settlements. “People would sometimes laugh at my farm, at me, but now it is an eye-opener to them”, she said.

Come 2020, Narayan expects to harvest close to 500 tonnes of the mana cane variety from her sugar cane farm. FSC CEO Graham Clark says, “what has helped her efforts, is that her farm has achieved 100% germination and having an excellent seed cane is a driving influential factor”.

Narayan’s farm has also been fortunate in that irrigation has been an advantage. The farm sits near a neighbouring stream and within the farm itself there is a small bore hole, both of which FSC has drawn from and used to irrigate her farm during the slightly dry weather experienced some months back.

Being the only lady farmer in the area is also a source of pride for her and for FSC, because it shows gender and age is no barrier to perseverance and success. Her positive outlook on life has been a source of fortitude for Narayan and has helped navigate her challenges over time.

Clark says “working with Pushpa on her farm has been very rewarding for us, it has allowed us to re-introduce sugar cane farming to this area, especially to those who have left the industry. We have been able to showcase what can be done with their land and reassure them that sugar cane farming will continue to grow”.

A very happy Narayan continues to sing praises for the FSC Field Teams around her area, who have assisted her significantly.

A devout Christian for eight years now, Narayan also credits her faith for her endearing attitude and advises would-be lady farmers out there, to never give up and God will always make a way!

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For more information, please contact:

Elenoa Korovulavula | Head of Strategic Communications | Fiji Sugar Corporation | Email: elenoa.korovulavula@fsc.com.fj | Mobile: 999 6009