

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

7 August 2019

### **It was always sugar cane for Chand**

Ritesh Chand bought his 15 acre sugar cane farm, located at Coqeloa, some twenty minutes from Labasa town in 2017. After two years, he has grown the tonnage at least twenty-eight times over.

Born in Suva but raised in Labasa, Chand like his dad before him, has stayed with sugar cane farming.

“I never wanted to do anything else, just to plant sugar cane”, a cheery Chand said.

Now with a family of his own, married with four children, three of whom attend school in Suva and his 2½ year toddler lives with him and his wife on his sugar cane farm. He is always hard at work on his farm from morning to dusk. Because of his relentless farming ethic, he has been able to grow his tonnage exponentially from almost nothing to two hundred tonnes this year.

One of the things that has aided him well, is that he uses machinery on his farm. “I inherited the tractor and some other farming machinery from my father”, Chand says. He believes that the farming equipment has enhanced his efforts tremendously.

FSC CEO Graham Clark says “Yes we believe mechanisation is the way forward for the industry, that’s why we have invested in thirty tractors last year and have a total of eight mechanical harvesters rotating within the sugar belt, the specific focus is to enhance mechanisation in our sugar cane farms”.



**Right: Ritesh Chand, standing on his 15-acre sugar cane farm in Coqeloa, within the Bucaisau sector in Labasa**

Currently Chand manages his father's two farms which collectively sum up to around twenty-eight acres and his own sugar cane farm, which is fifteen acres. His father's farm should produce around six hundred tonnes of cane this year and his own farm, at least two hundred tonnes.

He works with two labourers and including him, there are always three people working on his farm daily. "I am usually at my farm from 5:30am till around 11.30am, I take a break then return at around 2:30pm and finish off the day at 6pm", says an enthusiastic Chand. The long hours of labouring on his farm has made him physically strong and healthy.

"Yes farming is also very good for health, being active and out there", he says.

Chand uses six varieties on his farm, *Nadiri*, *Ragna*, *Qamea*, *Viwa*, *LF91* and *Galoa*. Different varieties has its own advantages depending on the soil type. For Chand, the *ragna* variety has so far proved the best. "Ragna has the best ratoon", he says emphatically

Whilst his two labourers have a constant presence on his farm, his 80 year old dad also helps out when he can. Chand says "my father is a source of inspiration for me".



**Above: Assistant Minister of Sugar Hon. George Vignathan, during a recent SRIF Field Day which was held at Ritesh Chand's farm**

Towards the sugar industry, Chand maintains a positive outlook. In fact, he is looking to expand his sugar cane farms and he particularly is on the look-out for more farms to buy. "I am really interested in farms on flat land or land that's flat that can be turned into sugar cane farms", Chand says.

Flat land because it would be easier for him to develop mechanically.

According to Chand, there are agents of positive development circling the industry and one just has to tap into it to properly capitalise on it. He is very thankful to the Government for the planting grants and the increased subsidies in fertiliser and weedicide. All this are agents of positive change for the industry.

So far, at 399 tonnes, he has harvested close to 50% of his farm and his dad's two farms. Recently his farm was a showpiece, hosting a joint FSC and Sugar Research Institute of Fiji (SRIF) Field Day attended by the Assistant Minister of Sugar Industry Hon. George Vignathan. When he bought his farm two years ago, SRIF provided him with seed cane in the *Qamea* and *Viwa* variety. Today, SRIF has also assisted him with intercropping having provided him with cow peas and urdi. It is a common practice for sugar cane growers to engage in intercropping for not only does it assist with soil health but is also supplementary seasonal income for farmers.

Chand is also appreciative of FSC's service. "FSC's been helpful and I appreciate their mechanical harvesters", he says. However, Chand is still in want of harvesters specifically designed for hilly areas. Close to 2½ acres of his land is hilly and with mounting labourer shortage, Chand feels mechanical harvesters for hilly areas is the way forward. Clark says "we expect to trial mechanical harvesters later this year and test its suitability to the land topography".

Next year Chand is targeting a milestone goal to harvest 1000 tonnes. The only disadvantage he sees right now is the cost of labour per tonne, which at \$20 per tonne is somewhat overwhelming. But true to his positive nature, Chand remains unfazed and optimistic in what the future holds for him with sugar cane farming.

**ENDS**

***For more information, please contact:***

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