

# Understand biosecurity



The American iguanas is a major attraction at the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji booth during the 2011 Crest Agriculture Show at the Vodafone Arena in Laucala Bay, Suva. Photo: RONALD KUMAR

Source: BIOSECURITY AUTHORITY OF FIJI

Biosecurity came to the forefront this week as thousands of people visited the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji's (BAF) booth at the 2011 Crest Agriculture Show.

Many became more aware of biosecurity issues, its importance to them, the agricultural industry and the environment.

Prior to and during the week, BAF was encouraging people to visit its booth at the show because it was an ideal opportunity for people to learn the importance of biosecurity and BAF operations, and how people can help BAF protect them, the agricultural industry and environment from the devastating effects of pests and diseases.

The BAF booth at the show has on display the American iguana, Asian subterranean termite nest and information on other biosecurity issues affecting Fiji like the American frobblood disease, local pests and diseases (dalo beetle, fruit flies), invasive pests and diseases of priority (Giant African snail, foot and mouth disease, taro leaf blight and rabies, etc).

BAF officers are also at hand at the booth to explain how BAF helps Fiji maintain its position in the competitive agricultural export market.

BAF chief executive officer Elvis Silvestrini said biosecurity was everyone's responsibility and the public could play an important role in helping BAF manage pests and diseases by reporting encounters with pests, and assist in surveillance and control efforts.

"Biosecurity is one of the most critical issues in the shaping of our country's future well-being. So the need for public support cannot be underestimated.

"BAF will operate more effectively if people support our goals and the work we do.

"Just one serious pest and disease could significantly threaten our entire future as a nation. New predators like the American iguana can catastrophically alter or even wipe out unique habitats and species that attracts tourists and enhance economic growth.



BAF chief executive Elvis Silvestrini

## PEOPLE CAN HELP BY:

- learning how to protect their homes against termites;
- not moving pests such as the American iguanas;
- not transporting dalo from Viti Levu or fresh produce from Rotuma;
- ensuring movement of livestock from Brucellosis affected areas is approved by BAF; and
- declaring items when they enter Fiji just to be safe.

"New diseases and pests can also damage agricultural production and affect trade in international markets. The economic consequences of failing to protect Fiji and its biological resources can affect our jobs, our health and our lifestyle."

Visitors at the BAF booth showed a lot of interest in the American iguana, the Asian subterranean termites (AST), the dalo beetle and unwanted pests and diseases like taro leaf blight, foot and mouth disease and the giant African snail.

The American iguana has been the talk of the town for the media. It is said to have been brought in illegally into Fiji and released on Qamea Island (off Taveuni Island) and now it has spread to Laucala, Taveuni and Matagi Island. If the pests are not controlled and eradicated it could have a disastrous effect on our environment, food security and the economy.

Mr Silvestrini said the eradication of these iguanas is a challenge because they are arboreal (tree dwelling), well camouflaged and have excellent eyesight thus they are able to avoid detection. They are also excellent swimmers and usually climb a tree and drop into water

where they can stay submerged for more than an hour. A good way of eradication would be locating all American iguanas nesting areas and controlling the breeding by destroying the eggs.

However, he said the public could play a huge role in the eradication process by reporting any sighting of the American iguana to BAF, avoid transporting the pest to other parts of the country and bringing in captured American iguanas to the nearest BAF office.

"Similarly with the Asian subterranean termites (AST) people can help us contain, control and manage termites in Fiji by not taking termite infested materials to non-infested areas and report any signs of termites to BAF."



Biosecurity officer Mesake Beranaliva (right) show students a sample of the Asian subterranean termites and the devastation it could do to timber during the 2011 Crest Agriculture Show in Suva this week. Photo: RONALD KUMAR

BAF would like to remind people that all communities from Drasa to Saru including Lautoka City have been declared as biosecurity emergency areas under the Biosecurity Emergency Regulation 2010. The Biosecurity Emergency (Termites) Regulation 2010 is currently in effect and prohibits the removal of any wooden materials, plants and plant products, timber and building material, furniture; personal effects and soil from infested areas.

Offences carry a maximum fine of \$40,000 for individuals and \$200,000 for corporate bodies.

At the BAF booth, the biosecurity officers are prepared to advise people on various biosecurity matters. A team from the Western Division - experienced in dealing with termites - will be at the booth to delve more information concerning the termites, its detection and how to protect homes from the harmful insect.

BAF officers will also be talking about how destructive the American iguana is and how people can help eradicate the pest. As people travel in and out of the country, there is information about items which are allowed and prohibited to be brought in and out.

BAF also plays a huge role in ensuring Fiji maintains its position in the competitive agricultural export market by providing information, conducting inspections, handing out certifications and training to meet the international import requirements.

Last month, BAF conducted a two-day workshop with farmers, fresh produce exporters, extension and research officers from the Ministry of Primary Industries in the Western Division.

The training focused on requirements that must be met to export fresh commodities to New Zealand (NZ), in accordance with standards mentioned in Bilateral Quarantine Agreement (BQA) between the two countries.

A bilateral quarantine agreement (BQA) is often needed when trade negotiations are undertaken between countries for agricultural produce that may harbour pests and diseases which may be harmful to the importing country.

BAF is also part of the Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA) Programme, which is a new trade facilitation programme, set up by the Australian government to help Pacific islands countries (PICs) as a support mechanism for the expansion of export market opportunities for horticultural and other agricultural commodities.

"We want people to understand the importance of biosecurity and BAF and support us in our work to protect our plants, animals, environment, people and economy."

Mr Silvestrini said foreign pests and diseases posed a significant threat to Fiji's plants, animals and environment.

"Fiji is free of most dangerous pests and diseases and we want to keep it that way," he said.