Marshall Islands and FAO

Partnersing to improve food security and income-earning opportunities

Since the Marshall Islands joined FAO in 1999, cooperation has been geared towards strengthening capacities to improve food security. As a country heavily dependent on development assistance and food import, weight is also given to boost agriculture and fisheries, while respecting the ecosystem of the country, and building resilience to natural disasters and climate change.

Providing policy support for food security

The Marshall Islands’ high dependence on development assistance and food imports, combined with limited economic activities in fisheries and agriculture, constitutes a significant policy challenge.

In support of the country’s efforts to develop and reinforce its national food security strategic framework, FAO has assisted by strengthening capacity for evidence-based policy analysis and formulation, and strategic planning. In so doing, it has also assisted the country in a review of current policy and regulatory frameworks and in strengthening food control systems.

In the wake of the 2008 food price crisis, FAO conducted a vulnerability assessment to gauge the national food security situation and subsequently developed a food security recovery plan, including policy guidance to address soaring food prices. Thanks to FAO’s assistance, the Government developed and is currently implementing a food security policy.

In collaboration with the World Health Organization and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, further policy options for improved food security were shared with the Government and a study on health tariffs was conducted with a view to informing the country’s ongoing tax reform.

SUBREGIONAL SCOPE – COUNTRY FOCUS

Strategic direction for FAO assistance to Marshall Islands is provided by the 2013-2017 Country Programming Framework (CPF) for the Pacific Subregion, which balances regional-level initiatives with demand-driven country-specific plans for 14 Pacific Island Countries. Across the region, assistance is centred on five priority areas:

- Improved policy plans and legislation
- Enhancement of ecologically sustainable agricultural production, including forestry and fisheries
- Improved food quality and safety
- Improved production, processing and marketing of agricultural produce
- Protection and sustainable use of biodiversity

Aligning FAO’s expertise to the Marshall Islands’ development priorities

Further to the above region-wide priorities, FAO assistance at the country level takes into account relevant priorities in key national development policies, including the Vision 2018. This identifies priorities for the country to focus in order to attain food security, reduce imports and boost exports – which are among the objectives of the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Resources and Development.

Accordingly, the focus of FAO’s CPF for the Marshall Islands is on food and nutrition security that is resilient to impacts of disasters and climate change. Support will be delivered under the following three priority outcomes:

- Strengthened policy, legislative, regulatory and strategic planning frameworks for food and nutrition security
- Increased availability, access and utilization of local food
- Strengthened capacity for environmental management and resilience (including disaster preparedness, emergency response and climate change)

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Cultivating disease-resistant bananas

Following the successful introduction of new banana varieties resistant to black Sigatoka disease, FAO is supporting development of their large-scale production in the Marshall Islands. Propagation mother blocks and demonstration sites using a narrow pit system have been established on the outer island atolls of Arno, Ebon, Likiep, Majuro, Maloelap, Mili and Ujae. Hands-on participatory workshops have targeted field staff, farmers and students, with a focus on good practices in pest and disease management, banana micro-propagation and tissue culture, and soil management. Over 200 farmers, students and members of non-governmental organizations have gained a better understanding of atoll agriculture and the importance of growing black Sigatoka disease-resistant banana varieties. The success of the intervention is shown by post-assistance data, which point to an increased availability of bananas at roadside markets between Majuro and Laura, as well as in Majuro’s main supermarkets.

Developing sustainable aquaculture

Given the rich oceanic resources of the Marshall Islands, aquaculture has strong potential for contributing to the country’s food security and development. Marine resources have a significant economic importance, partly through the income derived from fishing licences and partly through the employment and income generated from the tuna loining plant in Majuro. Enhancing the sustainable development of fisheries is consequently a top priority for the country.

Specific support is provided by FAO for developing responsible income-generating fisheries activities in the outer islands, while promoting a culturally sensitive approach that combines traditional resource management practices with the introduction of new ideas and methods. Aquaculture development has been assessed and related procedures and processes reviewed, including for the introduction and movement of aquatic species. Assistance has been provided at the national level to strengthen the capacities of both the public and private sector in assessing biosecurity risks related to aquaculture development.

Following the identification and analysis of proposed aquaculture commodities and sites, recommendations for potential aquaculture activities have been produced, and aquaculture activities have been carried out in the outer islands in cooperation with the College of the Marshall Islands Land Grant. Steps have also been taken to harmonize risk assessment systems and aquatic animal health management across Micronesia, and FAO assistance has led to a proposal for the establishment of a subregional aquaculture network in Micronesia.