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Round table talks to boost role of Pacific Islands in international food trade Agriculture and fisheries trade could increase food security

Wellington, New Zealand, 3 September 2012 - The 15th Annual Round-Table Meeting (RTM) on Agricultural Trade and Sustainable Development for Pacific Island Countries (PICs) opened here today at Kingsgate Hotel organized by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to help the islands increase their share of the growing regional and international trade in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry goods. The RTM will host a discussion about trade development initiatives and consider how existing and anticipated trade arrangements may affect the Pacific Islands. The Round Table runs through 7 September.

Vili A. Fuavao, FAO Representative Subregional Representative for the Pacific Islands, said, "The Round Table Meetings encourage the Pacific Island Countries to further develop their economies, particularly the agro-food, fisheries and forestry sectors. By increasing trade in food products, the Pacific Islands would create additional quality jobs and ultimately improve food security by making nutritious food more available year-round at affordable prices."

Coming to grips with multilateral policies and agreements

The Round Table also will look at multilateral food and agriculture trade policies and agreements, including those of the World Trade Organization, the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement, the Economic Partnership Agreements and the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations. Agreements and trade regimes like these can make international and regional trade in food and agriculture goods a challenge for small developing island countries, because the rules they set can be very expensive and difficult to meet.

Building private sector partnerships and preparing for climate change

Other issues the RTM will take up include how to make markets and international and regional trade more accessible; promoting trade and sustainable development by developing private sector partnerships; and, the impact of food safety and quality on agriculture and fisheries trade.

The RTM will also consider the impact of forestry biosecurity and invasive species. It will review health surveillance systems in the Pacific and New Zealand.

The global status of fisheries, fishery subsidies and the regional status of Tuna exports are also on the RTM's agenda along with eco-labeling and certification.

The RTM will discuss strategies to help Pacific Island Countries reduce the growing impact of climate change on agriculture, fisheries and forestry, including the goods these sectors produce for trade and export.

Origin of Round Table Meetings on trade and development for PICs

The Round Table grew out of the 1997 FAO South West Pacific Ministers of Agriculture meeting. The ministers asked FAO and other multilateral and regional agencies to help assess how the World Trade Organization and the Uruguay Round agreements on trade, agriculture, and fisheries policies could affect the Pacific Island countries.

Since the RTMs began, more than 350 Pacific Island delegates have attended the RTMs from the ministries of agriculture, fisheries, forestry and trade. Private sector representatives have also been welcomed at the RTMs.

The five-day Round Table was organized and coordinated by the FAO Subregional Office for the Pacific Islands based in Apia, Samoa in collaboration with the Government of New Zealand and other partners, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Auckland-based Pacific Islands Trade and Investment. The New Zealand Government contributed fund towards the cost of participation of country representatives and private sectors.