

Ministerial Statement
35th Session of the FAO Regional Conference for
ASIA and the PACIFIC

Director General

Excellencies

Hon. Ministers of Agriculture for the Member Countries

Distinguished Delegates from Countries and Various Organizations

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Talofa and Warm Greetings from Tuvalu.

It is indeed an honour and great privilege for me to join all of you Excellencies and distinguished delegates to this "35th Session of FAO Regional conference for Asia and the Pacific".

I extend my deepest appreciation to the APRC Secretariat for organizing this virtual conference to allow members and organizations to deliberate, cooperate and collaborate on issues of common interest – 'food security and agriculture'.

I must acknowledge that the unexpected outbreak of covid-19 has created an unprecedented level of uncertainty and has challenged every aspect of our lives. As Leaders and Christians, let us all remember in our thoughts and prayers those who have perished globally due to the spread of covid-19.

Tuvalu's food and agricultural sector is already under threatened by a multitude of factors such as insecurity, climate change, infectious diseases, natural resources degradation and natural disasters. The outbreak of covid-19 further compounded this with its impacts generally spread across different countries.

Excellencies,

Agriculture is an important sector for Tuvalu as it is the main source for the livelihood of communities. Tuvalu's agricultural sector relies on innovative best practices to ensure sustainability of local food production to minimize the impacts of climate change on food crops and livestock.

The outbreak of covid-19 and the declaration of a Health State of Emergency by the Government on the 20th March 2020 directly led to the establishment of a covid-19 Task Force and the development of a comprehensive "response and preparedness plan" for the country.

Unsurprisingly and of greater concern was the issue of food security. Government recognized that providing sustain adequate food supply chain for the people of Tuvalu will be challenging if trading halts due to the risk of spreading covid-19.

On that note, I am delighted to share the measures and strategies that have been activated by the Government of Tuvalu to minimize disruptions to food security and agricultural services.

1. Fatoaga Fiafia on Fongafale stepped up its effort in supplying fresh vegetables to the public on Funafuti and distributing seedlings to the public for home gardening.
2. Fast tracking the planting of root crops at the new agroforestry site in Funafala to enhance food security and better integrate traditional farming practices to sustain local food production
3. Encourage farmers on the outer islands to plant more root crops and promote traditional ways of preserving methods to pro-long lifespan of food items.
4. Control selling of basic food items in shops by instigating a food voucher system to limit the number of basic food items a household can purchase within a two week period.
5. Strict monitoring of stock of other food items (canned food, frozen food, cleaning soaps, and detergent) in shops and developing a threshold system to trigger rationing measures; and
6. Working closely with importers in ordering adequate supply of food items to avoid food run out.

Excellencies,

With that, I call upon all member countries, international and regional partners and organizations to come together and discuss practical and effective measures to combat the impacts of covid-19 on food and agricultural services. Tuvalu is fully committed to continue working in partnership with FAO and SPC to addressing national and regional needs to reduce food and agricultural insecurity.

The Government and the people of Tuvalu underscores and appreciates the unprecedented support it receives from FAO and SPC and welcome future support to ensure that food security and agricultural issues in Tuvalu are appropriately and adequately addressed.

Excellencies, I wish you all a very successful conference and fruitful deliberations. It is my hope and prayer that the decisions taken over the course of this meeting will lead to real and lasting positive changes.

Fakafetai lasi

TUVALU MOTE ATUA.