The School of Agriculture and Food Technology (SAFT) welcomed new and continuing students of Agriculture to another year of learning. This orientation was divided into sections – one for the whole Campus and the other for all SAFT students.

For SAFT, the program started with the Head of School of Agriculture and Food Technology (SAFT), Associate Professor Mohammed Umar, welcomed all the students and staff to the Alafua Campus doing undergraduate and postgraduate courses in agriculture. He briefly gave a description of SAFT and its main focus. He talked about the Institution of Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture (IRETA) which involves the Alafua farm and their integrated role in teaching, research and providing practical training in agriculture. He also mentioned opportunities for scholarships such as ACIAR, USP-GA, the Government and so forth.

Dr. Jagdish Bhati explained the study program planning and pathways for various agriculture qualifications. He also explained the different researches that are done in USP Alafua.

...continued on page 2...
Moodle and Turn-it-in were the main emphasizes made by Dr. Diarra Siaka. He also explained to the students how lectures, tutorials and lab or practical are being done in classes. He also added that their behavior and attendance in classes are very important.

Mr. Ioane Malaki talked about two main core courses when studying for the undergraduate program. He clearly explained the Research project management skills (AG383) course, which is basically a course that allows students to choose and research on a project that interest them with the help of a supervisor, who will be any of the Senior lecturers. Mr. Malaki also mentioned the Vocational practical experience (AG384) course on how this training or practical is managed throughout the 20 weeks.

The Student Learning Support Services was explained by Dr. Rashmi Kant. He mentioned inter-school debate series that occurs within and between faculties in USP Alafua campus and USP Suva campus. Dr. Kant also talked about student associations which are formed by group of students from the same island. He pointed out that to resolve any conflicts that may arise during their studies, the staff mainly including the SAFT secretary, senior lectures and most importantly the Head of SAFT will always be of help if and when needed.

Former SAFT student Rohit Lal and his supervisor, former soil science lecturer Dr. Danilo Guinto, met at the 29th Fertilizer and Lime Research Centre workshop held on 9-11 February 2016 at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Rohit is currently pursuing his PhD degree at Massey under the auspices of a New Zealand Aid PhD scholarship programme. He is supervised by Dr. Nick Roskruge, Senior Lecturer in Horticulture at the Institute of Agriculture and Environment.

Rohit graduated in 2014 with an M.Agric degree at USP Alafua with his research on the influence of mucuna fallow crop on selected soil properties and taro yield in Taveuni, Fiji.

For his PhD, Rohit is keen on continuing his previous work into developing a sustainable taro production system for growers in Fiji through the use of an integrated nutrient management approach.
Students enrolling in USP Alafua campus increases every year. This year on the 8th of February 2016, USP Alafua held its first orientation for this new semester. The program started with a word of prayer from the Student President, Mr. Max Lazarus followed by the Head of School of Agriculture and Food Technology (SAFT), Associate Professor Mohammed Umar’s welcoming.

Mr. Umar greeted the new, continuing and the SIT students from all different islands of the Pacific and the USA. He talked about putting facts to experience or real life situation. He wanted the students to know that it is more important to put things into practice rather than just knowing, and that students should be able to use the knowledge that they have gained while studying at USP. He encouraged the students to enjoy studying, have fun in learning and work hard to become successful.

Afioga Tilafono David Hunter, Chief Executive Officer of the Scientific Research Organization of Samoa (SROS) was the guest speaker for this event. His main emphasis was on Agriculture; choosing agriculture to be the student’s first choice of program they pick while enrolling in USP Alafua. He mentioned that Samoa already has too many lawyers so students should look at science or agriculture as their major. He highlighted some of the employment opportunities that they will have from choosing to become a teacher, a scientist, an agriculturalist, a soil scientist, and so many more. He encouraged them to always remember their parents, friends, religious leaders, communities and also the different islands they come from while studying at USP.

Mr. Tanielu Kepa Siose, a PhD candidate of SAFT spoke about his experience while being a student in USP Alafua campus. He mentioned that Agriculture was not his first choice as he first started as a University student. He is now doing his PhD in the School of Agriculture and Food Technology, and it has become of great interest to him in learning about the soil and other agriculture related areas.

The Campus Director, Leatualevao Ruby Vaa also gave some words of encouragement to the students. She added that they must be aware of campus rules and regulations, and should also make use of their student emails to email whenever they need help.

The students were introduced to Student Academic Services (SAS); how they will help them while studying in USP, computer lab and the librarians gave them a brief outline of how everything works in the library.
The University of the South Pacific (USP), Alafua campus in collaboration with the Centre de Recherches Insularies et Observatoire de l’Environnement (CRIOBE); the Institute for Pacific Coral Reefs, New Caledonia and the Department of Environment Wallis & Futuna; held a seminar on the status of coral reef ecosystems in the Pacific. The seminar was delivered by Prof. David Lecchini as a follow up from a workshop in October last year. In his seminar Prof. Lecchini highlighted the importance of long term monitoring of the health of coral reef ecosystems.

Coral reef ecosystems are among the most biologically diverse and complex marine ecosystems worldwide. In addition to their biological and ecological importance, coral reefs support major economic and physical functions (e.g. food production, tourism, biotechnology development and coast protection) that are essential for many countries. This is particularly true in the South Pacific where coral reefs sustain local economy of a great numbers of Pacific Islands and Territories. Unfortunately, the frequency and severity of natural and anthropogenic perturbations on coral reefs have greatly increased worldwide since the last three decades, and, as a consequence, reef communities (fish, coral and benthic invertebrates) have suffered unprecedented levels of mortality.

Current estimates indicate that 20% of coral reefs are already definitely destroyed, another 25% are in great immediate threat, and another 25% will be threatened by 2050 due to the effects of coastal development, over-fishing and multiple factors associated with global climate change.

Installation of layer cages at the USP-IRETA Farm

From the 22nd of February to the end of the month, Cages Technician, Anahera Matui from New Zealand with the farm workers installed layer cages to two poultry houses (House #9 and #10).

Changing from deep litter system to cage system is something new to the IRETA Farm, but with the hopes of increasing egg production through easy collection of eggs daily, minimizing feed going to waste, saving water using nipple drinkers, minimizing cracked and dirty eggs, identifying poor performance layers and also with this system, it will require less labor. This project is a start to what the USP-IRETA Farm will look like for the upcoming years.
With 4 weeks of semester 1 over, students of AG268 “Pathogens and Pests of Crops” course have started planting at their garden plots. This course coordinated by Dr. Rashmi Kant introduces students to various causes of diseases that damage crop plants and their produce. It also provides students with a background study in crop protection.

For the last four weeks, the students have been working and planting melons, cabbages and long beans on their plots with the objectives to find pests and diseases that damage these selected crops, and ways to prevent these crops from getting affected from pests and diseases.

The inspection of imported empty sea containers by Ratan Singh, Bianca Upton, Gabriella Stephenson and Alistair Wilson resulted in the finding of approx 10 live adult mosquitoes in one container.

The container PCIU1515947, was loaded on the vessel Southern Lily in Pago Pago Samoa.

The container was given a knock down spray and this will be followed up with suitable treatment to kill the mosquitoes.

Health department Officers were contacted as soon as the mosquitoes were located and sent the captured sample for immediate identification. It has been identified as:

The southern house mosquito, *Culex quinquefasciatus*, can transmit zoonotic diseases that affect humans and wild and domestic animals, such as lymphatic filariasis, avian malaria, St. Louis encephalitis, Western equine encephalitis, and West Nile fever. It causes infection through biting during blood meal.

With all the current publicity over the zika virus it is easy to see why our efforts of mosquito control at the border are important.

Quarantine Officers regularly inspect vehicles and machinery as well as vessel decks for containers of pooled water which could carry mosquito larvae to our country.
Ta’imua Samoa is a non-governmental organization that offers a unique program that provides the platform for emerging leaders to appreciate the pressing development issues facing Samoa today.

By raising awareness of emergent leaders of key political, economic, social, technological, environmental and cultural issues facing the development of Samoa, the programme ensures a pool of well-informed Samoan Leaders in the future.

The training allows for participants to step out of their comfort zone, meet the leaders of, respective organizations and draw conclusions of their own on how they think things are being run by provision of constructive criticism.

It is a program that not only develops oneself professionally but also allows expanding on networks by meeting new acquaintances and colleagues from other sectors of the workforce.

This year saw USP Alafua Campus’ first ever staff member to complete this programme - Ms SeulGee Samuelu also the SAS Coordinator together with 25 other participants completed and graduated in the Leadership Samoa Programme on Friday, 12 February, 2016 at the NUS Samoa Fale which was attended by the Prime Minister of Samoa, Afioga Tuilaepa Fatialofa Aiono Sailele Maleilegaoi who is also the Patron for Leadership Samoa and keynote speaker of the evening, the Australian High Commission, HE Sue Langford, Managing Directors for the respective organizations the participants were from as well as families and friends.

Ms Samuelu gave the evening’s speech on behalf of her Class to acknowledge the support from respective work places, families and friends and the opportunity to be selected for this programme. Ms Samuelu shared that Leadership is about having to lead people with different talents, different ideas, different personalities to produce something GREAT!

“Mother Theresa reminds us that what we may not be able to do what another person can do, another person cannot do what we can do but ‘TOGETHER’ we can do GREAT things to produce the desired results effectively.....Leadership is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that the impacts lasts in your absence....in conclusion....If your actions inspire others to dream more, to do more and become more, you are TRULY a Leader....John Quincy Adams...unquote”.

We congratulate Ms Samuelu for her achievement which is also an achievement for USP Alafua Campus too!!
Dr. Sunil Singh has been teaching biology at USP Alafua campus and has been in this position for just over a year now.

For the first time biology courses from the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Science Technology and the Environment, are being offered through Alafua campus and complement courses taken as part of Bachelor of Science (BSc) and Bachelor of Environmental Science Programs. A number of the courses including service courses are available online and students are able to complete majority of courses towards their degree while being based in Samoa. There is a special “Science Teachers Accelerated Program (STAP)” being offered to science teachers in Samoa sponsored by the government in recognition of the need to up skill and upgrade the qualifications of in-service teachers.

In addition to teaching, Dr. Singh is also engaged in research and currently working on a project on the biosecurity risks from rat lungworm (Angiostrongylus cantonensis) in collaboration with colleagues from Fiji, New Zealand and New Caledonia.

He is keen to collaborate with researchers interested in biosecurity risk assessments and nematology and develop new projects. He is also the current editor for the Journal of the South Pacific Agriculture (JOSPA) and would like to encourage researchers and postgraduate students to submit their manuscripts to JOSPA.

The USP Alafua main fale was filled with on campus and off campus students on 19th of February, Friday night. The Student Association Committee organized a welcome party for new and returning students of Alafua campus.

The President Mr Max Lazarus a third year agriculture student from the Solomon Islands commented that the night was all about enjoyment, and the students did just that. Max and his committee aims to help the university by proposing for more facilities to assist with student studies. The student committee consists of 3 Solomon Islanders, 3 Tongans, 2 Fijians and 1 Samoan.
Celebrating forests and water

Every year on the International Day of Forests we celebrate the ways in which forests and trees sustain and protect us. This year, we are raising awareness of how forests are key to the planet’s supply of freshwater, which is essential for life.

Did you know?
- Forests watersheds and wetlands supply 75 percent of the world’s accessible freshwater
- About one-third of the world’s largest cities obtain a significant proportion of their drinking water directly from forested protected areas
- Forests act as natural water filters
- Climate change is influencing the availability of water resources

International Day of Forests is on 21st of March - Mark your calendar!

www.fao.org/forestry/international-day-of-forests/en/

Fiji Student Association welcome new students

New students from Fiji were welcomed by the continuing students studying in Alafua USP campus on the 25th of February 2016.

The Fiji Association organizes this event every year for new members of their association. First, was their welcoming kava ceremony, Sevusevu as it is known in Fiji while the ladies prepare and serve BBQ. Mr. Eroni is the President with about 30 Fijian students enrolled in USP Alafua campus.

What’s on campus?

Some members of the Fijian Student Association
On 20 and 21 February, Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Winston cut a path of destruction across Fiji, causing widespread damage in all four divisions: Eastern, Northern, Western and Central. With sustained winds of 230 km per hour and gusts of 325 km per hour, the tropical cyclone was one of the most severe to ever hit the South Pacific. An estimated 350 000 Fijians were affected (roughly 40 percent of the population), including nearly 55 000 who remain in evacuation centres. The Government of Fiji - which promptly declared a State of Natural Disaster - estimates the total damage at USD 500 million.

Key messages

- Damage to crops and livestock is estimated at USD 61 million. This figure will increase following the assessment of the fisheries subsector. With much of the country relying on subsistence production to meet their food needs, restoring agriculture and fishery based livelihoods is critical to avoid dependency on food aid in the coming months.

- Affected families urgently need food and agricultural assistance - including seeds, planting materials and farming equipment - to avoid food shortages and quickly replant crops.

- Fijian women - a majority of whom rely on agriculture as their sole source of income are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, and must be a key focus of response efforts.

FAO requires USD 2.89 million to provide immediate crop, livestock and fisheries support to 25 370 cyclone-affected people. The medium- to long-term recovery costs will be greater, and have not been estimated at this time.


Images from: http://mashable.com/2016/02/21/tropical-cyclone-winston-photos/#c2i3pwuDrAgb
Cyclone Winston damages hopes for Tongan vanilla crop

Access to food is a now a major concern in Tonga, where estimates suggest more than half of the island nation's food crops have been damaged. Cyclone Winston caused strong winds and heavy rain in Tonga as a category two storm before the cyclone moved away, strengthened and returned to Tonga later in the same week causing further damage.

While there have been cyclone-related deaths in Fiji, Tongans are relieved they have escaped the severity. However, agriculture crops were not so lucky, with coconut crops, banana plantations and vanilla bean farms most affected.

Tongan agriculture industry damaged

Unfortunately this year Cyclone Winston has caused further heartache for the Tongan agricultural industry. Ron Simpson is a retired Australian agronomist who lives in Tonga. "The banana plantations are 85 to 95 per cent gone because they can't withstand strong wind," Mr. Simpson said. "It'll have a great effect on local supply for bananas, because at the present time there is no export of bananas out of Tonga, but that is being looked at. "As far as vanilla goes, vanilla export is going to be affected for the export trade. "A lot of the root crops, particularly the maniok, were smashed off. "Some of those were getting close to be ready for harvest and most of those are utilized for local family food anyway. "Things like taro, yams were fine because they sit prostrate and close to the ground. "It's amazing; people are just very stoic [and] a lot of those guys out in the villages, farmers, they just keep going. "When I was working for Agronomy Australia we used to agonize over drought. "They just stoically build up and they think, well that's part of it and go again". There are hopes for a better vanilla season once El Nino moves on and the extreme weather eases.

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Journal of the South Pacific Agriculture (JOSPA) is a peer reviewed Agricultural journal which publishes research articles, critical reviews, general papers and short communications in tropical agriculture. It has highly qualified editors and a transparent, double-blind peer review system which normally takes about 6 to 8 weeks from submission of manuscript to the decision with reviewers’ comments. We are inviting contributions relevant to agriculture in the tropics for JOSPA’s Volume 19.

Please send manuscripts as email attachments to the editor at sunil.singh@samoa.usp.ac.fj

Deadline for submission will be 21 October 2016. Guide for authors will be provided upon request. Refer to section on Submission of Manuscripts for additional information required on submission.

For technical enquiries, please contact the Managing Editor:

Sunil Singh (PhD)

The University of the South Pacific

School of Biological and Chemical Sciences

Alafua Campus, Apia, Samoa

Tel: (+685) 21671 Ext 272; Fax: (+685) 22347

Email: sunil.singh@samoa.usp.ac.fj
February IMAGES

(Middle) - CEO of SROS, David Hunter with students

(Front) - Campus Director & HOS of SAFT with staff members

Installing layer cages at the IRETA Farm

Staff & students during the SAFT Orientation