

07/07/2008 Fiji team studies biofuel production in China

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[Fiji Beijing embassy press release]

The Fiji embassy in Beijing reports that a delegation comprising the acting permanent secretary for agriculture, Dr Richard Beyer, as well Mr Viliame Yabakivou, Mr Aliko Turagakula and Mr Viliame Vosarogo from the Ministry of Energy are on their way to China to research how ethanol is made from tavioka (cassava). The delegation will see first-hand and learn how Chinese farmers in Guangxi Province mechanize the planting and harvesting of cassava. They will also observe how the farmers are able to produce the kind of size and varieties of tavioka they do for their ethanol production facilities. The task force delegation will learn how tavioka is converted into ethanol and starch, as well as and how many useful by-products result from the process. The Fiji team will see and learn how edible tavioka starch may be used for making paper. This will add value to our sugar industry. The team will visit a mill that converts sugar cane "bagass" into an expensive variety of paper that is sold on the world markets. High-quality paper is in global short supply at present. Bagass, which is presently used in Fiji sugar mills for producing energy, has been regarded as a waste raw material. The delegation will specifically visit sugar cane farms to see the variety of sugar cane that is planted in Guangxi Province and how their mills are capable of producing more than 8m tonnes of sugar each year for the domestic China market. This output accounts for 60 per cent of China's domestic needs. The visitors will also observe the housekeeping of Chinese sugar mills and how clean their sugar mills are. They will see and learn the crop rotation method that Guangxi farmers employ to maximize their smallholdings with melons, corn, tavioka, and soybeans planted in rows between crop plantings. This is in addition to the small vegetables that are planted for their own consumption. Fiji's ambassador believes this aspect of the visit will be an "eye-opening revelation for the Fiji team". The team will also see and learn of China's waste conversion processes. By way of example, ambassador Sir James Ah Koy says that 'the pile of rubbish at Delainavesi that's been there for generations could be cleaned up and used to produce power for the Ethanol Plant by way of a new Greenfield technology that converts waste and daily rubbish of all kinds into electricity. "The twin symbiotic projects of producing ethanol from tavioka and the production of electricity from daily household rubbish will produce energy (electricity) that's needed for the ethanol plant and will cost something in the region of 80m US dollars maximum," Sir James believes. According to the ambassador, the technologies used in these two projects are "home-grown Chinese" and can be transferred into the Fiji setting "100 per cent with Chinese partners and investors". "These twin greenfield projects are a must for Fiji and we should look to China for help in implementing them," Sir James emphasized. Sir James is working at a punishing pace with investors in China in several ways to get these twin projects off the ground. His vision is of a joint venture with China and with the Fiji government as a partner. The venture will operate either as a BOOT programme - that is, the Chinese build, own, operate and transfer - or as BOT programme where they build, own and transfer. According to the ambassador, several companies have shown interest in the two projects and feasibilities on the soundness of their respective investments are now being considered.

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