

Brewing resilience

Navigating climate challenges in Samoa's ava industry



Samoa's climate projections indicate a future marked by rising temperatures, more frequent episodes of extreme rainfall and increasingly intense cyclones. This is expected to impact the economy, with agriculture likely the most severely affected. Crops like kava, the Samoan variety of which is known as 'ava', typically thrive in conditions that are not excessively hot or dry; and extreme rainfall and cyclones can lead to waterlogging and damage to kava trees. Kava processing is also at risk, as unseasonal rainfall can impact root drying, and kava washing requires access to water.

The kava market in Samoa is domestically focused and spread across the main islands. Little kava is exported, and that which is, is generally the same quality as the local product. MDF is partnering with Samoa Herbs, a local kava exporter, to support increased exports of high-quality kava. Through the intervention, Samoa Herbs is providing farmers with extension services, upgrading processing equipment to improve the quality and quantity of kava exports, and improving marketing to attract fresh buyers.

A key aspect of the intervention is supporting kava farmers in Samoa to build resilience against climate change-induced extreme weather conditions, which not only threaten the yield and quality of kava crops on farm but also contribute to loss during kava processing.



During rainy seasons, income is greatly affected as we cannot dry the ava to sell. Samoa Herbs processing has saved me and my family the manual work of drying, pounding, and then looking for shops to sell the ava to.

Junior Filipo Lilo,
Kava farmer

A guide for growing

While close to 1,200 farmers in Samoa grow kava, at home and commercially, information about the types of kava and optimal growing practices is limited.

“A lack of understanding of different kavalactone profiles and thus, different effects of various varieties, means farmers continue to plant a single suboptimum variety, Ava Talo, which is still a very good remedy for insomnia. Enjoyable socialising varieties include Ava Le’a and Ava La’au, while Ava Mumu is perfect for the time-pressured executive as it dramatically calms the mind whilst leaving cognitive abilities sharp,” says Patrick Danny Rankin, Director of Samoa Herbs.

As part of improving the extension services provided to farmers, MDF supported Samoa Herbs to develop an ava growing guide and workshop training information to help farmers increase kava production and quality. While highlighting the various types of kava, the guide also includes information on climate adaptation and resilience, which can help farmers minimise damage and loss.

These climate-resilient practices include taking proactive measures before a cyclone and implementing agroforestry practices such as planting specific trees in between kava plants to provide protection from the sun and wind.

Planting such shade trees also help farmers improve soil health.

“Agroforestry, reduced plant density per acre, seasonal cover tree trimming, and multi-cropping will help with soil moisture retention and minimise erosion. Monitoring practices will increase resilience, to best mitigate the effects of climate change, and are essential elements rural farmers should understand,” adds Patrick.

Samoa Herbs will present the growing guide to kava stakeholders through workshops in Savaii and Upolu. Feedback will aid in finalising the guide for national adoption in Samoa.

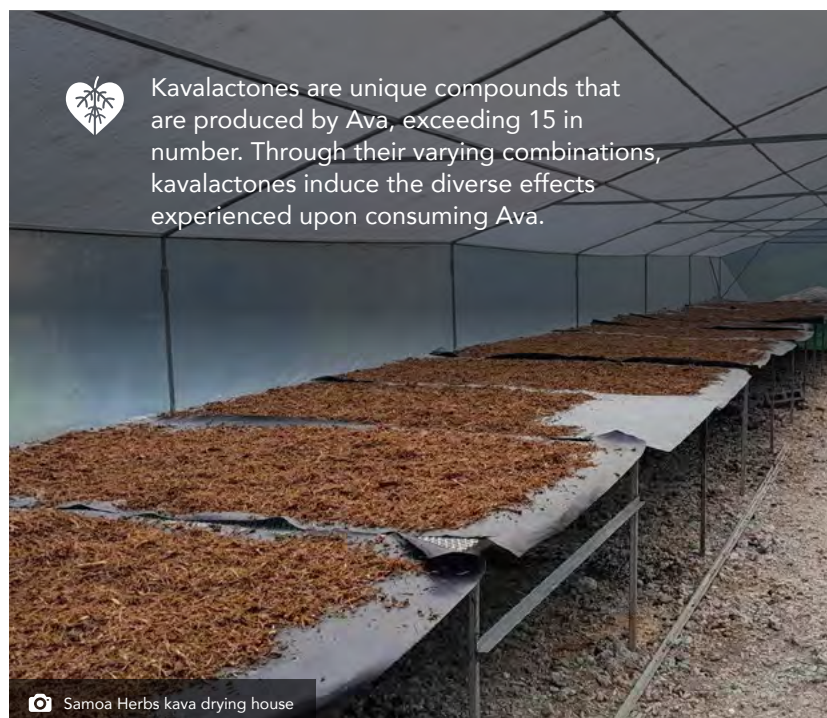
Investing in climate resilience

While better information will support farmers to adapt their farming practices to a changing climate, Samoa Herbs will continue to invest in key infrastructure, such as a water reservoir to mitigate the effects of droughts and ensure a consistent water supply for processing. MDF will also support the partner to establish solar drying houses, to protect the harvested kava from excessively wet weather and reduce drying time.

With Pacific farmers increasingly feeling the impact of climate change, building climate resilience will be key to sustaining livelihoods and ensuring that farmers can continue to access viable, lucrative markets.

Improved farming practices, a consistent water supply and improved drying capabilities can enhance the efficiency and sustainability of kava

farming in Samoa. Better quality and consistency in kava production can benefit farmers through better market prices and strengthen the entire value chain, from local processing to global marketing, enhancing Samoa's reputation as a source of premium kava.



My family has greatly benefited from working with Samoa Herbs because we can sell the ava consistently throughout the year and not worry about the changing weather patterns. More and more ava farmers are asking me if they can also sell their ava to Samoa Herbs when he comes around, which is good for me as sometimes I am not able to meet the volume of ava order from Samoa Herbs.

Junior Filipo Lilo,
Kava farmer