Nalini Sangita Ram, Fijian farmer

"It's cheaper than pesticides and lasts longer. Even the grass looks good.

Sector:
High Value Agriculture

Partner:
Organic Plus Pte Ltd

Women cultivating change in agriculture

Introduction

MDF is working with Fijian company Organic Plus Pte Ltd to promote and improve the distribution of its Organic Plus Liquid Compost soil conditioner. Made from organic waste — including chicken manure and distillery by-products — the locally produced compost helps farmers strengthen soil health and improve yields. Organic Plus offers a climate-smart solution, protecting soil health, which in turn supports more resilient agricultural production in the face of changing climactic conditions.

The Fijian economy relies heavily on agriculture, which supports food security and livelihoods for more than 80 per cent of the rural population. However, this vital sector faces growing pressure from climate variability, soil degradation and rising production costs. Synthetic fertilisers are often expensive, and their extensive use can contribute to reduced soil fertility and plant health.

Farmers adopting Organic Plus have reported increased productivity and are sharing their results with other farmers and networks. At the same time, MDF has also observed general shifts in household dynamics, with more women being involved in, and often leading, decisions about farm input purchases.

By supporting Organic Plus through joint marketing initiatives and strategic partnerships like Post Fiji, MDF is helping expand access to climate-smart agricultural inputs and improve farmer outreach. In doing so, MDF is demonstrating how locally led innovation can address climate vulnerability, strengthen rural livelihoods, and create opportunities for inclusive growth. Farmers like Nalini Sangita Ram are seeing the results firsthand — and sharing what works.

Nalini leads with climate-smart farming

In Rakiraki's Madhwani settlement—known locally as Nokonoko—Nalini Sangita Ram manages her nine acre farm with the help of her family, producing fruits and vegetables for household use and roadside sales. She lives with her husband, two children and father-in-law, and actively farms around four acres of low-lying land.

Farming is not new to Nalini. She began helping her mother on the farm as a child and has returned to working on the land. Today, she leads all aspects of farm work except land preparation, which her husband manages. He works full-time as a driver while Nalini manages the farm herself, from planting and harvesting to sales and making decisions about inputs and crop planning. Her crops include watermelon, corn, beans, tomatoes, chillies and eggplant, the majority of which are sold at a nearby roadside stall.

> I used to spend FJD40 to FJD50 a week on vegetables. Now I grow my own and earn from it too.

Across Fiji, women like Nalini are forming the backbone of fresh produce farming. What started as a way to cut household costs is increasingly becoming a key source of income.

Greener leaves and better yields

The land's proximity to the sea and river makes it vulnerable to flooding and saltwater intrusion. This can lead to increased soil salinity over time. These conditions can stunt plant growth, cause root rot, wilting and increase chances of crop disease.

"The first (watermelon) harvest, most of the fruits were damaged and the size was not really big because the high tide came in," she explains.

Nalini was introduced to Organic Plus Liquid Compost when a family friend visited and noticed her freshly ploughed land ready for planting. He offered her a free sample of Organic Plus liquid compost to try. Before this, Nalini had only used cow manure as fertiliser.

Although a little sceptical at first, Nalini did some research and came across the Organic Plus liquid compost Facebook page, where she found testimonial videos by farmers. These videos were developed with MDF support, to share information with potential Organic Plus farmers. She decided to apply the compost to her crops and saw the difference it made. The liquid compost provided more readily available nutrients and introduced beneficial microbes that improved soil health. It was also easier to apply. Nalini sprays the liquid compost solution directly onto the soil or leaves, making it more efficient and less labour-intensive.

"It (cow manure) was good but not like liquid compost," she says. "Before, watermelon was small. When I used the liquid compost, I saw the fruiting size grow—bigger fruit."

> And the corn when we used to plant before, the leaves were not too green and the fruits always had insects. This time when I applied (liquid compost) on the corn, I saw the colour of the leaves changing from light green to dark green. The fruits were really big this time.

In 2024 Nalini harvested around 1.5 tonnes of watermelon from two plots — one just under an acre and the other approximately one acre, earning around FJD1,700 (AUD1,100). She sold most of it at her roadside stall, pricing by size rather than weight.

Corn has also proved popular. "You won't believe it; I sold two (25kg) bags within an hour on the roadside. It was a Sunday, and I thought, sah, people are crazy about corn!" she laughs.

She now plans to save some of her corn harvest for seeds because she is going to expand production. From just 12 lines of corn fertilised with liquid compost, she harvested four bags which weighed around 25kg each. Nalini says she previously planted 65 lines without using liquid compost and harvested just 15 bags.

"Before, when we used to plant corn, most of the time the plants were not good. Either they dry out, or if not, a lot of insects there," she says. "I've seen the difference myself."

Efficiency gains

Nalini works seven days a week. Her day starts at 5.30am on the farm, followed by milking her three cows before breakfast and a second farm visit in the morning if the weather is good. In the afternoon she returns to the farm between 4pm and 6pm.

She applies the Organic Plus liquid compost directly onto the leaves and has also adapted her planting techniques, spacing seeds more strategically and using raised rows to prevent flood damage. Without irrigation, she relies on rainwater and liquid compost nutrients to keep her crops healthy. Improved soil health supports moisture retention, ensuring plants remain healthy during dry periods.

"It's cheaper than pesticides and lasts longer," she says. "Even the grass looks good."

Her results reflect broader trends. In 2024, MDF research found that watermelon farmers using Organic Plus liquid compost earned on average FJD4,000 in additional income per household. These findings will be further investigated and the impact reported in 2025.

> I told the seed shop about Organic Plus. They want to try it too.

Additionally, over 117 dalo-farming households across Fiji have adopted the compost, also reporting greener foliage, heavier yields and shorter harvest cycles, even under adverse conditions.

Nalini shares her knowledge with others, reflecting a broader shift in Fiji's farming communities towards locally led solutions that strengthen climate resilience and reduce reliance on costly, imported inputs. With Organic Plus liquid compost, she's growing more, spending less and inspiring others to try new techniques.

Climate Change Story