

### Remarkable growth of seaweed farming in Bougainville

*The number of people farming cottonii seaweed (Kappaphycus alvarezii) in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea and its small offshore islands increased remarkably from 800 in 2014 to 4,552 in 2015 after training for coastal communities sparked great interest in seaweed farming. Eleven new nurseries and seaweed planting sites have since been established around Bougainville to support the large number of farmers entering this new industry.*

These 4,552 farmers are now planting seaweed that they will send to Bougainville Seaweed Ltd (BSL), who exports the dried seaweed to China. In addition to buying the seaweed produced by the farmers, BSL supports them with seed stock nurseries that are now established in the Nissan, Selau, Atoll, Tinputz and Buka Districts of Bougainville.

This significant increase in the number of farmers is attributable to post-training scale-up and expansion efforts being coordinated by BSL, district officers of Bougainville, the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community

(SPC). The National Fisheries Authority has also provided a great deal of ropes and other equipment to BSL and the farmers.

Conducted by SPC, the training 'Practical skills for aquaculture of cottonii seaweed' was held in Buka from 6 to 9 October 2014. Sixty-nine participants – farmers from over 20 islands, district officers, National Fisheries Authority officials and BSL staff – completed the training. Topics included seaweed nurseries, farming methods and practices, seaweed processing and disaster mitigation measures. The training sessions were led by Mr Kevin Labis, a trainer with extensive



*Kevin Labis, the lead trainer, shows how to select seaweed seed and tie it to lines. (Image: Avinash Singh)*



*Training on site selection and planting of seaweed using the off-bottom method (Image: Elenio Yap)*

commercial seaweed farming experience who had been contracted from the Philippines to conduct the training with SPC. The district officers and BSL extension staff have since utilised the skills gained from the training and taken seaweed farming out to the communities that were interested.

The training was the result of a multi-partner collaboration with one of the Pacific's leading development partners, the European Union, through its Increasing Agricultural Commodity Trade (IACT) Project. The IACT Project is implemented by SPC's Land Resources Division and the Fisheries Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division. SPC officials collaborated with the National Fisheries Authority in Papua New Guinea and the Bougainville government officials to conduct the training.

BSL's exports to China have brought in much needed economic returns to this autonomous region in Papua New Guinea, and confirm the existence of high demand for good quality seaweed in international markets. The first quarter of 2015 alone saw 40 tonnes exported out of Bougainville.

National Fisheries Authority Fisheries Officer Mr Kevin Anana said, 'The training was very timely as there has not been any training conducted since the introduction of seaweed farming on Carteret Island (the main production area, north of Buka). The training was fantastic and very helpful.'

The hands-on practical training was intended to help participants improve their own production and pass the knowledge on to their communities so that more people can engage in seaweed farming.

Mr Raymond Moworu of Bougainville Seaweed Ltd said that there was huge scope for growth of the seaweed industry and that hurdles to reduce high transportation costs must be addressed to take the industry further.

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