

**9th REGIONAL MEETING OF
PACIFIC HEADS OF AGRICULTURE AND FORESTRY SERVICES (PHOAFS)
(15-17 May , Virtual Meeting)**

Paper reference	Session:4 Agenda Item:7
Title	Vision for adapted Crops and Soils
Action	Decision
Author(s)	SPC, CSIRO, DFAT, MFAT, US State Department

Summary

The Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) is a global movement to champion nutritious, climate-resilient crops by focusing on the agricultural fundamentals – seeds and soils. The movement initially began in Africa. SPC, CSIRO, DFAT, MFAT and US State Department have been consulting on the possibility of developing a Pacific VACS programme tailored to the specific needs and priorities of Pacific Countries and Territories.

It is proposed, if of interest to the Pacific Heads of Agriculture, to initiate work to co-create a Pacific VACS approach which would be adapted to the Pacific context. In particular, it would build on existing work and initiatives such as the Regional Research Agenda, the Pacific Soils Partnership, the PAPGREN and be designed to contribute to the goals of the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Strategy once endorsed.

Recommendation:

The PHOAFS are invited to

- a) **endorse** SPC to convene and coordinate a co-creation exercise, with support from Australia (through DFAT and CSIRO), and New Zealand (through MFAT) to develop a Pacific VACS programme.
- b) **request** SPC to ensure the design is adapted to the Pacific context, particularly building on existing work and initiatives such as the Regional Research Agenda, the Pacific Soils Partnership, the PAPGREN and designed to contribute to the goals of the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Strategy.

Background

1. The Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS) is a global movement to champion nutritious, climate-resilient crops by focusing on the agricultural fundamentals – seeds and soils. The movement initially began in Africa, initiated through a partnership between the US State Department, the African Union, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. In Africa the movement has successfully mobilized more than USD\$150 million in funding from a variety of donors including the Netherlands, the UK, Norway, Japan, and the Rockefeller Foundation.
2. Various discussions on adapting VACS for the Pacific were commenced during the 2023 Crop Diversity Summit in Berlin between SPC and the US State Department. Further discussions were held with research institutes and Governments of Australia and New Zealand in March and April this year.

Purpose of this paper

- To provide background to the PHOAFS on the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils programme
 - To gauge interest from the PHOAFS on developing a Pacific VACS
 - To seek endorsement of PHOAFS to move forward with a co creation process to develop Pacific VACS.
3. VACS seeks to deliver high-yielding, locally adapted crop varieties to farmers and consumers in an effort to improve food security and nutrition. In Africa, this work has been progressed through a three phased approach:

Phase 1 – identify the most important crops for nutrition through a consultation process (approximately 6 months).

A consultative process was undertaken to determine a prioritised set of the most important crops for nutrition across six crop categories for each sub-region in Africa. The crops categories included legumes, cereals, roots and tubers, nuts and oilseeds, and fruits and vegetables, as well as trees used for food, and ensured distribution of crops that are important throughout the five regions of Africa for their consumption, breeding potential, and contribution to improving soil quality. The end result was agreement on a prioritised set of 60 crops at the first technical convening.

Phase 2 – assess how some of those crops and the soils they are grown in will be affected by climate change through the year 2050 (approximately 6 months).

This phase developed climate-crop models for a subset of prioritised crops to project how their productivity will fare under different climate scenarios. This subset of 20-25 crops was selected through a follow-up workshop and consultations with the participants of the initial technical convening. The climate crop-modelling team then produced Opportunity Crop Profiles for 20 of these crops to build the evidence base for scaling investments.

Phase 3 – mobilise resources to accelerate research, development and deployment for these crops (long term).

This phase launched alongside phases 1 and 2 and resulted in three major institutions – IFAD, CGIAR, and FAO – each creating dedicated funding channels for VACS implementation through donor funds. This phase is ongoing and will focus on scaling investment to accelerate research, development and deployment for these crops in order to provide additional production options for farmers, and nutritious choices for consumers.

Pacific VACS opportunity

4. If of interest to the Pacific Heads of Agriculture, we propose to initiate work to co-create a Pacific VACS approach.
5. This would draw from the three phased approach developed in Africa, but would be adapted to the Pacific context, particularly building on existing work and initiatives such as the Regional Research Agenda, the Pacific Soils Partnership, the PAPGREN and designed to contribute to the goals of the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Strategy once endorsed. Drawing on learnings from the Africa experience, the Pacific approach would also closely integrate a soils component alongside the crop research to address issues of soil health and soil nutrients required for prioritised crops and projected impact of climate change on soil health.
6. SPC would act as a conveyor and coordinator of a co-creation exercise, with support from the Government of Australia (through DFAT and CSIRO), and the Government of New Zealand (through MFAT).
7. The co-creation exercise would focus on:
 - a) Alignment with, building on and supporting existing Pacific initiatives.
 - b) Geographic targeting (regional, sub-regional or targeted countries);
 - c) Consultation processes.
 - d) Governance and funding structures.
 - e) Timeframes

Recommendation:

8. The PHOAFS are invited to
 - a) **endorse** SPC to convene and coordinate a co-creation exercise, with support from Australia (through DFAT and CSIRO), and New Zealand (through MFAT) to develop a Pacific VACS programme.
 - b) **request** SPC to ensure the design is adapted to the Pacific context, particularly building on existing work and initiatives such as the Regional Research Agenda, the Pacific Soils Partnership, the PAPGREN and designed to contribute to the goals of the Pacific Agriculture and Forestry Strategy.