



## Western Province has potential to supply rice

BY: Sylvester Yagi

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**T**HE Western Province has the potential to be a major rice supplier to the country provided that it has the right rice grain variety for the climate and soil types across the Province, and the proper technical know-how and machinery to grow the rice.

Two representatives from Trukai Industries and Trukai's parent company Sun Rice in Australia visited various villages in the North, Middle, and South Fly regions of Western Province from March 31 to April 4 to collect soil samples and also see what rice varieties were being grown.

Villages visited were Birimkamba, Matkomnai and Rarengre in North Fly, Manda 2 and Obo in Middle Fly and Kautru, Lewada and Baramura in the South Fly.

Their visit was made possible by the Ok Tedi Development Foundation, which is now shifting its focus to looking at ways it can assist Community Mine Continuation Agreement (CMCA) communities explore improved income earning opportunities to sustain their livelihood.

Lae-based Trukai Agriculture Manager Jarrod Pirie said there was potential for commercial production in the Obo area, which has an estimated land mass of more than 200 hectares available for rice farming.

Pirie said there were other costs factors involved that would have to be explored.

The other village that was of particular interest to Trukai was Lewada village, which was the only village that had an irrigation system in place that supplied water to its rice fields and to other crop gardens.

"I see they've got a really strong growing culture there (Lewada), which is really good and they've got the irrigation know-how. There might be an opportunity there to work with Lewada or use Lewada as demonstration site for expanding that kind of village production system" he said.

A short grain variety is the type of rice currently being grown in the three regions of Western Province; however, Trukai and Sun Rice are more interested in buying long grain rice. It was observed that the rice grown in Kautru was affected by a fungal disease and Sun Rice Grower Services Manager Chris Quirk said to go into a large commercial scale, rice farmers need to be growing the right variety of disease-resistant rice.

Quirk said Western Province can grow better varieties of rice but what was more important was developing the culture of growing rice.

“From our point of view, we would have to bring in some varieties that best suits (the Province). Each variety has a different farming period as far as planting times and harvest times, so some are longer some are shorter, to suit different environments. It’s a matter of fitting that right variety to the right environment,” he said.

Meanwhile, villagers said they could grow rice and were very interested but also needed more technical skills and rice milling machines for harvesting. Thanks to the training and exposure provided by OTDF to the CMCA communities in 2014/2015 there is now great interest to partner with Trukai to further develop rice production in the Province. Many villages were thankful to have grown rice early in 2015, enabling them to store then survive on their harvest during the extended dry weather late in that year.

A Memorandum of Understanding between OTDF and Trukai along with a business plan to inform commercial trials and to further develop the opportunities seen during this trip is being written in collaboration with Business for Millennium Development.

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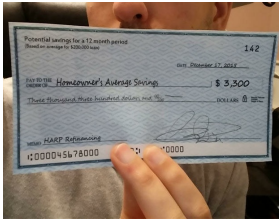
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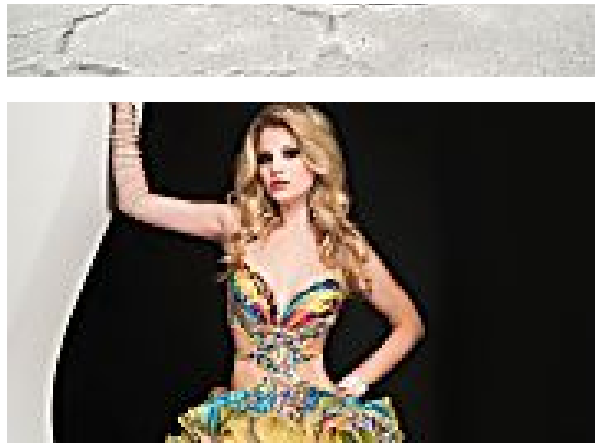
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