

Squash farming

Demand reignites interest



Based on the success of this first shipment, Tonga and China jointly signed a market access protocol in October 2017 and trade has gradually increased. Picture: NISHI TRADING



By SAMANTHA RINA

Farmers in Tonga are taking a renewed interest in growing squash amid growing export demand for this agricultural produce.

As the island kingdom continues to recover in the aftermath of a Category 4 tropical cyclone in February, squash growers and exporters are making every effort to supply what they can.

Squash grower and exporter Nishi Trading said despite the Tropical Cyclone Gita setback, they were aiming to supply at least 600-700 metric tonnes (mt) of the 1000mt order from China this year.

"We have a lot more farmers growing (squash) this year than last year for our company. This is indicated in the volume we predict we will send this year. Export volumes to China increased from an initial one container or 24 metric tonnes (mt) to 248mt last year. This year, the order from China is 1000mt but our aim is maybe 600-700mt," said Minoru Nishi Jr., the managing director of Nishi Trading.

Better quality, better price

Mr Nishi said they were prioritising efforts to improve the

quality of squash for the export market.

"Our focus this year is to ensure our quality is at its best so that we can demand a better price from the market next year and beyond. If we are to sustain the industry our priority must be on quality and with that in mind we must also focus our attention on improving our production systems with all our farmers," he said.

Sioeli Ha'amea has been in the trade for more than 10 years and is hoping to see better prices for export squash.

"It has been 16 years of being a squash supplier. If the market price every year was stable I would definitely supply 1000 tonnes or more. As a widow woman, this is a tough job but I would like it if the government worked with us more, for example, (provide) some kind of financial support as the export overseas by squash exporting companies is so important to Tonga's economy," she said.

Tonga sent its first consignment of squash to China in December 2016 after more than a year of negotiations and inspections. These efforts were supported by farmers, exporters and the Australian and New Zealand-funded Pacific Horticultural and Agricultural Market Access (PHAMA) Program* which has played an instrumental role in establishing market access for Tongan squash to China.

Technical support

PHAMA helped Nishi Trading

meet China's specified standards for their packhouse and funded two verification visits by the Chinese Quarantine Agency (the Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine agency or AQSIQ). The improved packhouse facility has been made available to all Tongan squash exporters on a cost recovery basis while future planning and investment for a second suitable facility is progressed. PHAMA also supported the first shipment of



PHAMA helped Nishi Trading meet China's specified standards for their packhouse. Picture: NISHI TRADING

squash to China so Nishi Trading and a biosecurity official could observe it arriving and being inspected.

Based on the success of this first shipment, Tonga and China jointly signed a market access protocol in October 2017 and trade has gradually increased.

Prior to Tropical Cyclone Gita, the projected exports of squash for 2018 were 2000 mts but this was revised down to 1000

mts. Three-year projections for squash exports into China continue to show a steady increase to 5000 tonnes in year three, or over \$A6m (\$F9m) (TOP 10m) in total over the 2018-2020 period. The economic impact of PHAMA's support to the squash industry has also been revised down but is still a substantial estimated \$A1.6m (\$F2.2m) over 2018-2020 (down from \$A2.0m \$F3.0m).

The gradual increase in demand for squash from Tonga is anticipated to generate more farming and job opportunities. Exporters are also hoping that a reduction in China's import duty of 13 per cent on Tongan squash can be negotiated between the governments.

Squash exports peaked at 22,500 tonnes in 2003 before suffering a major decline after Tonga lost out on market share to Japan due to competition from larger exporting countries. At its peak, more than 800 Tongan farmers produced squash for export to Japan. Exports to Korea also became more important as the supply into Japan decreased.

Moving forward

Mr Nishi said the current challenges faced by the squash sector in Tonga were biosecurity and food safety systems. He said these were being addressed through increased training for staff and farmers to strengthen their crop management work plan.

"This work extended to delivering HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point system) and GAP (good agricultural

practices) standard's training to address food safety issues. Infrastructural limitations are also an area highlighted by the Chinese Government that need improvements. A significant amount of resources was required to address this area," he said.

Mr Nishi said the real value of public-private partnership was demonstrated when PHAMA, the Tongan Government and squash industry joined to co-fund activities to eliminate biosecurity risks surrounding the pack house which allowed a successful audit of the facility by China.

"The work of PHAMA through the Tonga Market Access Working Group public-private partnership shows that in our case of Tonga it is working well and that it is having impact on the ground in areas where funds are well spent. The program has demonstrated that with careful planning and execution, effective and meaningful activities can lead to improvements in industry and thus create new employment opportunities for our people in the agricultural sector."

PHAMA support towards the squash industry in Tonga is aligned with its objectives to maintain and better utilise market access by developing the capacity of the public and private sectors to meet market requirements, including compliance with international food safety standards.

■ Samantha Rina is the communications officer for the PHAMA Project.

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	CINEMA 2,3 & 4	DMAX	VIP GOLD	CINEMA 2,3 & 4	DMAX OR VIP GOLD	CINEMA 1 & 2	VIP GOLD		
DHADAK (PG) Mon	5:35pm	10:00am, 1:30pm, 8:20pm		5:50pm	10:10am, 1:25pm, 8:20pm	10:00am, 1:30pm, 5:10pm, 8:10pm			
Tue	5:35pm	10:00am, 1:30pm, 8:20pm		5:50pm	10:10am, 1:25pm, 8:20pm	10:00am, 1:30pm, 5:10pm, 8:10pm			
THE EQUALIZER 2 (ATMOS) (R13) Mon		5:35pm			5:40pm				
Tue		5:35pm			5:40pm				
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Tue	12:50pm, 8:45pm			10:15am, 12:55pm, 9:00pm		12:50pm, 8:30pm	12:50pm, 8:30pm		
SKYSCRAPER (PG) Mon	10:25am, 3:15pm, 9:10pm			3:25pm, 8:55pm		10:30am, 6:10pm			
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ANT-MAN AND THE WASP (PG) Mon	5:50pm		5:50pm	5:45pm		3:30pm			
Tue	10:15am, 5:50pm		5:50pm	5:50pm		3:30pm	3:30pm		
MAYA THE BEE: THE HONEY GAMES (G) Mon	3:40pm		3:40pm	3:45pm					
Tue	3:40pm		3:40pm	3:45pm					
TEEFA IN TROUBLE (PG) Mon	6:10pm			12:25pm					
HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 3: S.V (PG) Mon	1:25pm		1:25pm	10:10am					
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MAMMA MIA! HERE WE GO AGAIN (PG) Mon	12:40pm, 8:25pm		8:25pm	10:20am, 6:20pm, 8:20pm					
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