PRA Workshop 1: Report

Held at Raffles Gateway Hotel, Nadi, Fiji
10th to 14th May 2004

Sandra Bernklau – Consultant
Wilco Liebriets – PestNet
Mat Purea – FAO
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening Address</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Fuavao, FAO Representative for the Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Summary</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PestNet Presentation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grahame Jackson’s presentation</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical Sessions</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Evaluation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations and Conclusions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Appendixes (contact authors for those not present)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix A: Workshop Agenda
Appendix B: PestNet Presentation
Appendix C: Grahame Jackson’s Presentation
Appendix D: List of Participants
Appendix E: Sandra Bernklau’s Presentation
Dr Vili Fuavao’s Opening Remarks

Many farmers in Pacific Island countries find difficulty in accessing information on pests and diseases on agriculture food crops and quarantine related issues in the region. In most cases, this is due mainly to inadequate country human resources especially in the areas of Taxonomic expertise, extension / advisory resource services of member countries and isolation of some countries due to huge distances from each other and also having poor medium of communication in information distribution between these countries. In addition, when it comes to pest identification, there is also the concern on Specimens of Pest and Diseases that are sent abroad for identification, verification and confirmation which often takes time and above all costly to member countries.

In our region there is much information on Agricultural pest and diseases that exists from past surveys, research reports, extension articles, country reports, biological control reports, pesticides reports, etc. In most cases, pests control strategies has been developed, in some of these reports but hardly reached the farmers due to poor resources in internal communication, etc. In fact, most time farmers go without this information.

The FAO Pacific Island member countries realized that new approaches are needed and several of these member countries namely Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Marshall Islands and Samoa have approached FAO SAPA in 1999 for technical assistance to see if information and advice, such as the interactive E-Mail services of PestNet can be used to assist farmers in the Pacific.

In addition to the member countries requests for FAO technical assistance, the Fourth FAO Meeting of South West Pacific Ministers of Agriculture, Port Vila, Vanuatu, 23 – 24 July 2001, recognized the importance and potential of PestNet. The Ministers acknowledged:

- the need for access to information as a means of reducing poverty and improving food security in the region,
- the difficulties that farmers experience in accessing information on quarantine / plant protection, and the potential of PestNet to help.
- they stressed that identification of pest problems remains a constraint and that PestNet has come a long way in providing a cheap, fast and sustainable way of overcoming these difficulties.
- that electronic services such as that of PestNet have a huge part to play in bridging this information gap, and that they can be used equally by government and non-government organizations.

FAO SAPA and PestNet collaborated and prepared a TCP project proposal and was submitted to FAO TCP unit in Rome for technical assistance principally to provide improved communication services and training through national plant protection officers and research services including NGOs so that they can provide directly to the farmers, a more effective and fast information exchange services.
Today marks **the first training workshop in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)** in learning approaches to determine how to effectively address farmers’ Plant Protection perception and needs.

During this training workshop you will agree on a PRA survey approach to ensure uniformity of methodology for the farmers’ perception and needs survey; what data to collect, etc. There will also be field training in one of the selected farming communities here in the Nadi / Lautoka districts to test this approach.

At the end of this PRA training workshop you will then return to your countries to carry out similar PRA survey to determine farmers’ plant protection perceptions and needs using the agreed PRA methodology. At the later part of this year (during Training Workshop 2) you will be required to present your findings on your farmers’ plant protection perception in your country for analysis, discussions, solution formulation and report documentation. We want to know how farmers ‘see’ pests, particularly diseases and how they link this to nutrients problems. That is, we want to understand their options, beliefs and attitudes.

In conclusion, I must say that seeing the problem through the eyes of farmers is difficult but essential.

The way farmers view plant protection problems will be useful in this context and hence the importance of the PRA survey approaches that you will apply to your farmers in your individual countries.

The PRA Training Workshop is now Officially Opened.
Background

Farmers in Pacific Island countries find difficulty in accessing information on pests and diseases. Much information exists from surveys, many problems have been researched and control strategies developed, but the geographic isolation of countries, poor internal communication and inadequately resourced extension services prevent information reaching farmers. Pacific Island countries realize that new approaches are needed, and several (Fiji, Kiribati, Niue, Marshall Islands and Samoa) have approached FAO SAPA to see if information and advice, such as provided regionally through the e-mail services of Pacific PestNet, can be used to assist farmers.

Pacific PestNet is a free service, run by volunteers each of whom has worked in the region for 20-30 years. It was launched in December 1999, and has 452 members (as of 30th May 2003) half of whom are from Pacific islands. To date, more than 1700 messages have been posted. PestNet was registered as an NGO in Fiji on 21 June 2000.

There are considerable difficulties involved in assisting these farmers due to the number of people involved, their relative isolation and their varied needs. But PestNet believes that it can help: first an assessment of farmers’ perceptions of plant protection problems and then building local capacity at different levels (government research, extension and quarantine services, NGOs, farmer groups, churches and educational establishments) to deliver the information and advice required. Above all, ensuring easy access, accuracy and speed.

FAO TCP assistance is requested to support the expansion of PestNet, principally to provide improved services and training to farmers, directly and through national extension and research services. The project will first accurately identify farmers’ perceptions and needs in several countries, and based on the results, create awareness amongst farmers and farmer groups, including NGOs and women groups. The project will also foster the development and use of global databases of plant protection information, in the process providing the opportunity for countries to develop photographic libraries of their main crop pests and diseases to assist identification and control. The outcomes will be a service for farmers better adapted to their needs and consequently more sustainable. Ultimately, the project will enhance food security of rural communities in the region.

In order to make the service more adapted to farmers needs, farmer’s perceptions, values and beliefs needed to be explored. For this purpose, it was decided to train plant protection workers in participatory approaches in order to explore farmer’s views in plant protection issues.

Introduction

A need was recognized within PestNet under FAO, TCP/RAS/2909 that in order to better understand how farmers receive information and how they incorporate that information into changing their practices. The need to first accurately identify farmer’s perceptions of plant protection issues has resulted in the request to train plant protection officers in participatory approaches, or
participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods of gathering information. Participatory approaches will enable plant protection officers to better understand how farmer’s view plant protection issues by facilitating processes in which farmers can express their issues and concerns in their own manner. The PRA process reverses “traditional” approaches whereby the plant protection officer is viewed as being the “expert” and the farmer is expected to learn from them, and to take their advice. This traditional approach has largely failed as farmers perceptions of their plant protection issues, and potential solutions have not emerged. In order to reverse this “top down” approach, a “bottom up” method of getting information from the farmers to the plant protection officers needed to be put into place. Through the use of PRA methodology, plant protection officers can better dialogue with farmers in order to learn their issues, their concerns, beliefs, practices and knowledge about plant protection. Once the farmer’s knowledge and concerns are known, plant protection officers will then be better equipped to support them.

Based on discussions with PestNet, FAO, government staff and field workers from various NGOs, it was apparent that PRA approaches had been tried in the Pacific with success. In the Solomon Islands, the Kastom Gaden project routinely uses PRA approaches when working with subsistence farmers, and in Tonga, SPC has used PRA methodology when researching plant protection needs there (Halavatau S and S. Hazelman. Participatory Rural Appraisal for Farmer Participatory Research in Tonga. Report of a PRA Training Workshop and Farmer Survey in 6 Extension Districts in Tonga 21st October - 1st Nov 2002). Due to the success of these interventions, it was considered essential to train agricultural staff working in plant protection in PRA methodology.

Workshop Summary

This five day workshop had an overall objective of developing skills in participatory approaches to assist those working in plant protection to find out how farmers perceive pest problems. The detailed objectives are as follows;

- Discuss various methodologies in participatory practices that could be used in plant protection.
- Learn the skills needed in order to conduct a PRA and an RRA
- Practice the skills needed in order to conduct PRAs and RRAs
- Learn at least 3 participatory methodologies
- Field test at least 3 participatory methodologies
- Develop plans to implement PRAs in the participants home country
In order to meet those objectives the agenda included updates and introductions to PestNet as well as to “Pacific PestNet: Meeting Plant Protection Needs in the 21st century (TCP/RAS/2909) project”. In order to develop skills in participatory techniques, the workshop covered theory in participatory practices, skills required for implementing participatory approaches and 3 full days of practical sessions in which participatory approaches were practiced; 2 days in the classroom as well as one field experience day. Please find the workshop agenda attached as Appendix A.

Dr. Vili Fuavao, the FAO Representative to the Pacific opened the workshop with an address that linked the need for pest control personnel and agricultural workers with the introduction of participatory techniques. His address highlighted the urgent need for plant protection workers to understand plant protection issues from the farmers perspective and to ensure that information about plant protection issues reaches farmers all over the Pacific, to use the Pest Net modality.

The introduction to PestNet covered the history behind establishing PestNet, information about members, member services, success which PestNet has had in identifying pests as well as PestNet’s success with providing information to its subscribers rapidly throughout Asia and the Pacific as well as internationally. The presentation highlighted the advantages of using a facility such as PestNet for identification purposes, and provided examples of PestNet’s success in assisting farmers and agricultural workers in the Pacific as well as globally. As there are now fewer trained plant protection experts in the Pacific than at any time in the past 50 years, the urgent need for technical assistance which is available at all times has never been greater. In addition, the presentation linked the need for plant protection and trade and economic consequences of crop failures. Please refer to the PestNet presentation in Appendix B.

Grahame Jackson, also of PestNet provided an overview which linked the work of plant protection officers to the need to further understand beliefs, values and customs of the farmers which with they worked. His presentation further stressed that through the use of participatory approaches, plant protection officers and workers would be able to better understand how farmers perceive pests, disease and plant protection, and therefore be better equipped to work alongside them. Dr. Jackson’s presentation provided some key examples of how farmer’s beliefs are linked to their practices and perceptions. For example, how on Malaita, Solomon Islands, farmers do not perceive Taro Leaf Blight as a problem, as they have always experienced the disease. Please refer to Dr. Jackson’s presentation in Appendix C.

PRA Training - Days One to Three
The practical side of the workshop began with a collection of participant’s expectations of the workshop. Of the 21 participants in attendance, the majority of the participants thought that the workshop would be about participatory practices (11) and about PestNet (10). Some felt it would be about vital information regarding pests and others felt it was a workshop to share ideas and information. Regarding the participants expected outcomes for the workshop, the majority of the participants wanted to develop skills in
PRAs or PRA related practices (20) and five participants wished to know how they could better use PestNet in their home countries. Please refer to Appendix D for a complete list of participants.

Workshop participants thought that the workshop would be about;

- “dealing with farmers of different backgrounds”
- “learning participatory methods on how to transfer vital plant protection issues to farmers back home”
- “learning more about PestNet”
- “how to get vital information about pests and how to bring that to farmers”

Workshop participants hoped that they would learn;

- “methods used to convey messages to farmers at the grass roots level to enable them to solve their pest problems”
- “learn more about the advantages of PestNet and how I can make the most of the system for the benefit of my home country”
- “how to do PRAs”

After collecting the participant’s expectations of the workshop, the first theory session began by reviewing the philosophy behind the use of participatory practices and the reason why participation and participatory approaches are relevant in plant protection practices. Participants were provided with supplementary materials which gave them more detail and provided further references in order to assist with the theoretical background. Please refer to Appendix E for a complete set of workshop overheads used.

The participants were then introduced to the application of participatory approaches through research, monitoring and evaluation practices. A comparison of traditional methods of information gathering and sharing and participatory approaches was included in this session with comparisons of quantitative research methods such as the use of surveys being compared with qualitative research methods such as unstructured interviews. Participants were then able to compare the types of information that would result from the use of different methods.

Different participatory methods or “tools” were then introduced and in this session, participants were able to see the variety and scope of participatory tools that can be used. For the purpose of this workshop, the participants were introduced to and able to practice the use of focus groups, resource maps,
seasonal calendars and ranking matrixes.

Each of these tools was practiced during “mock” practice sessions which also introduced difficult situations for the facilitators to contend with. Each session examined different questions in plant protection that participants might use in the field, and each session provided participants with opportunities to discuss, formulate research questions and practice participatory skills. Two full days were utilized during the workshop for practical sessions prior to the field visit day.

PRA Training - Day Four
For the field visit day, nine groups were formed to undertake field testing in the Nadi / Lautoka area. Participants were matched with partners from another country in order to have them learn more about shared issues as well as to put participants in a new situation. Most groups had either a support person from the workshop or an agricultural extension officer in their team to provide them with translation, support and advice. Field visits were organized with individual farms rather than groups of farmers. This was done in order to both ensure that the maximum number of participants could practice their skills as well as to ensure that the field visit would go smoothly – to avoid the pitfalls prone to organizing focus group discussions with larger numbers.

The participants had to practice at least three participatory methods during their field visit. Each team therefore planned their field visit and prepared to utilize focus group discussion methods, plus two other methods being either a resource map, ranking matrix or seasonal calendar.

Topics for the field visit day included:

1. Practicing a good introduction,
2. What crops are grown here? (farm, village or community). What are the major crops – both subsistence and commercial and what are the minor crops?
3. How do you rate the productivity of these crops? Are you happy with the yields? Why?
4. What “inputs” do they have to produce these crops? Are they costly? Labour intensive? Who does them?
5. Are there any pests / problems they have noticed?
6. Are there any crops that are not grown anymore? Why?

Upon return from the field the participants were debriefed and asked to share their experience about the process of conducting PRAs in the field. Participants mostly felt that the field experience was a success. Some had difficulties with language and needed translation (English to Hindi), and many of them found that the farmer that they wished to interview was not available despite having had MAFF organize the visit. They were however able to interview the farmers sons or labourers instead.

Regarding the PRA exercise, the participants found that the different tools gave them different information and that by using several tools, they were able to gather a great deal of information relatively easily and in a short time. They also found that the tools were flexible and that they could do a focus group discussion in a field with a farmer, or they could do a ranking matrix, resource map or seasonal calendar under a tree or on a porch. They found that the tools could be moved around and ordered according to the situation which they found put the farmers at ease. They also found the tools useful methodologies which facilitated the farmers to see their own issues in “black and white” which in turn was a learning experience for the farmers.

The major issues that came out of the field research was the lack of knowledge which the farmers had about pest control, the lack of control options that they practiced and the expensive methods which they use to control pests on their crops.

**PRA Training - Day Five**
The last day of the workshop gave the participants some insight into data collection and analysis by going over methods of coding qualitative data. The session also gave the teams some practice in data analysis through a practical session where the teams analyzed their FGD data from the previous day.

Teams were also provided time and support in developing their country plans for PRA research. Each team was provided support by PestNet and FAO in developing their plans whilst the consultant provided advice regarding the use of PRA methods. The research topics for the in-country exercise were the same as that used for the field experience. Country guidelines included the target groups of 5 subsistence communities and 5 commercial farms per country. Each country would have different targets depending upon their own situation. In larger countries where there are commercial and subsistence farms, the framework would be used, however in smaller countries such as Nauru, only subsistence farmers would be interviewed. Country teams were
supported by PestNet and FAO in the development of their plans through discussions about budget, logistics, topic areas and target groups.

**Workshop evaluation**
In addition to the work on analysis and country planning, a short workshop evaluation was also held. In response to the evaluation questions, the participants provided the following answers;

1. **Did this workshop meet your expectations?**
   Two of the participants had no specific expectations, and four of the participants felt that it did not meet their expectations because a) “it was too rushed!” and b) they wanted to learn more about PestNet and pests and diseases. The remaining participants felt that the workshop fully met their expectations.

2. **What were the most important things that you learned?**
   Three of the participants felt that the most important things they learned about was about PestNet and the remaining participants felt that the most important things they learned were PRA techniques, how to gather information and how to use different PRA tools and methodologies.

3. **How did you feel about your facilitators?**
   Two of the participants felt that they would have preferred a facilitator who had greater technical knowledge of pests and diseases. Six of the participants felt that the facilitation was “good”, and the remaining felt that the facilitator was “very good” or “excellent” and that the facilitation was clear, well organised, humorous, inter-active and stimulating.

4. **How did you feel about the workshop content?**
   One participant felt that the workshop content was simply, “ok” and another felt that the content was too much to learn in one week. Another two participants felt that the workshop needed more information on a) helping farmers and b) on asking questions. The remaining participants felt that the content was either “good” or very good / excellent.

5. **How could we have improved this workshop?**
   There were twelve suggestions on how this workshop could be improved including: more information on analysis and reporting, more group work, more time for discussion, extend the workshop time and have less information on each slide. The majority response however was five participants who would have liked to have spent more time with farmers and have more field exposure.

6. **What would you like to learn more about next time?**
One participant wanted to learn more about pests and diseases, whilst the remaining participants wanted to learn more about data analysis and report writing.

**Recommendations and Conclusions**
In an ideal world it would be possible to stretch this workshop into a two week framework which would give adequate time for participants to really absorb the concepts behind participatory practices and approaches. Five days may have been sufficient to ensure skill development in methodology, but it is not sufficient time to internalize the differences between traditional approaches and participatory approaches.

The five day training however did give participants a good overview of participatory approaches and did provide them with basic skills in participatory methods in research. However, it should not be assumed that the participants are now ready to implement a participatory study without adequate support. It is hoped that participants will look to FAO and to the workshop facilitators for support whilst doing their research in their own countries.

During the next workshop it is proposed that the participants are given further exposure to qualitative data analysis and report writing skills. Therefore the next workshop also needs to be a practical workshop with the majority of sessions devoted to practicing new skills learned.

**List of Appendixes**
- Appendix A Workbench Agenda
- Appendix B Dr. Jackson's Presentation
- Appendix C List of Participants
- Appendix D Sandra Bernklau's Presentation
Appendix A

PestNet PRA Training Workshop
For Pacific Island Countries
(Sponsored by: FAO under TCP/RAS/2909)

Raffles Gateway Hotel Nadi Fiji
10th – 14th May 2004

Final DRAFT1 Agenda

Monday 10th May 2004 :

8:30 a.m. Registration

9:00 a.m. Opening:
- Opening Prayer – by Mr. Nakabuta Teuriaria (NPC Kiribati)
- Opening Remarks - by PestNet Official
- Opening Address by FAO Representative for the Pacific
  DrVili Fuavao

9:30 a.m. Morning Tea

Facilitator: Sandra and Wilco

9:45 a.m. Session 1: Introduction
- Presentation on the purpose and aim of the PestNet
- Review of workshop outline
- Review of workshop objectives

10:30 a.m. Session 2: Sandra
- Collection of workshop expectations
- Introduction to Participation – Why Participatory?
- Terminology – PRA, RRA, Qualitative Research etc

11:00 am
- Difference between participatory approaches in surveys and quantitative approaches – pro’s and con’s
- Different types of surveys – structured, semi-structured, in-depth

12:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00 pm  Facilitator:  Sandra

Session 3  “Tool Kits”
- overview of different participatory tools that can be used
- FGDs, timelines, ranking matrix, seasonal calendars, mapping,
  body mapping, surveys, interviews, photo essays, observations
  story boards, week in review, historical timelines, cause trees
  etc.

1:30 p.m.  Session 4  Skills Needed:  Sandra and Wilco

Skills needed for participatory approaches
- facilitation skills
- note-taking skills
- how to ask questions (different types of questions).
  - open / closed questions, probing, dangers etc.
Different ways of asking questions – Questioning techniques and
  skills

Pest Diagnostics – Types of Questions - Wilco

Practical Session – in groups (30 minutes)
Come up with different questions which are qualitative, related to
PestNet objectives – split into two groups, GO and NGO

3:00 p.m.  Afternoon Tea

3:15 p.m.  Session 5:  Sandra

How to handle difficult situations
How to ensure you are getting the information you need
What about gender differences?
Group Facilitation Practice – Use Key Questions already
Developed and in groups, practice FGD facilitation skills

5:00 p.m.  Adjourned

Tuesday, 11th May 2004

Facilitator:

8:30 a.m.  Session 4:  Feedback from Monday
  Review of Sessions
  Review of skills needed
Discussion about “bias”

Plan for the day – practice sessions – different tools

10:00 a.m. Morning Tea
10:15 a.m. Session 5:

Seasonal Calendars
Review of what seasonal calendars can be used for

Practice Session in groups

12:00 p.m. Lunch
Facilitator: Sandra
1:30 p.m. Session 6 Ranking Matrix

Review of how to conduct a Ranking Matrix exercise

Practice Sessions in Groups

3:00 p.m. Afternoon Tea
3:15 p.m. Session 7: Sandra

Resource Mapping

Review of how to conduct a Resource Map and Transect Walk

Practice Sessions in Groups

5:00 p.m. Adjourned

Wednesday, 12th May 2004

Facilitator: Mat Purea

9:00 a.m. Session 7:
PestNet Project update

10:00 a.m. Morning tea
10:15 a.m.  
*Session 8: Mat and Wilco*
Work Plan for NPCs and Participants when conducting PRA in their Countries using approved approach.
Discussions

12:00 p.m.  
**Lunch**

**Facilitator: Sandra**

1:30 p.m.  
*Session 9:*
Debrief practical sessions from Tuesday
Introduction to Analysis of PRA data
Importance of note-taking
Different techniques of analysis
Coding exercise / game
Hand-coding data

3:00 p.m.  
**Afternoon Tea**

3:15 p.m.  
*Session 10 Facilitator:*
Presentation on what to do in the field (Test Site)
PRA in two locations

5:00 p.m.  
**Adjourned**

**Thursday, 13th May 2004**

**Facilitator:**

9:00 a.m.  
*Session 12: Field Visit to Nadi / Lautoka*
FIELD VISIT

12:00 p.m.  
**Lunch**
FIELD VISIT

3:00 pm  
DEBRIEF FIELD VISIT

**Friday, 14th May 2004**

**Facilitator: Sandra, Mat and Wilco**

9:00 a.m.  
*Session 13: Debrief Field Visits*
Farmers interviews in relation to Plant Protection & PestNet
Discussion

10:00 a.m.  Morning Tea

10:15 a.m.  **Session 14: Facilitator:**
            Plans for implementing in Home country reviewed
            Has the practical experience changed the plans / ideas you
            originally had?

12:00 p.m.  Lunch

1:30 p.m.  **Session 15**  Presentation of country plans

            Workshop feedback

3:00 p.m.  Afternoon Tea and Official Closing of Meeting
# Appendix C

**Pacific PestNet PRA Training Workshop For Pacific Island Countries**  
**TCP/RAS/2909**

**Raffles Gateway Hotel Nadi, Fiji 10th – 14th May 2004**

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<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
</tr>
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| Cook Islands | Dr. Maja Poeschko              | Entomologist  
Tutokoitu Research Station, Ministry of Agriculture, P. O. Box 96 Rarotonga, Cook Islands research@oyster.net.ck |
|              | Ms Sherro Tomokino            | Quarantine Officer  
Ministry of Agriculture, P. O. Box 96, Rarotonga, Cook Islands quarantine@oyster.net.ck |
| Fiji         | Mr Moti Lal Autar              | Principal Research Officer  
Plant Protection, Koronivia Research Station, P. O. Box 77 Nausori, Fiji. Tel: 679 3477044 Fax: 3400262 |
|              | Mr Sant Kumar                  | General Manager (N.W. Co. Op. Fiji Ltd)  
P.O. Box 9825, Nadi Airport Fiji Islands Tel 6724566/ fax:672 4569 nwc@connect.com.fj |
|              | Mr Apaitia Macanawai          | Senior Research Officer  
Plant Protection, Ministry of Agriculture, Sugar & Land Resettlement, Koronivia Research Station, P. O Box 77 Nausori. Phone: 3477044, apaimacanawai@yahoo.com |
| Kiribati     | Mr Nakabuta Teuriaria         | Plant Protection Officer  
Head of Plant Protection/Quarantine section  
Division of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, Lands and Agriculture Development P.O.Box267 Bikeniben, Tarawa, Kiribati. Telephone 682 28211/28108/28080 Fax: 686 28333 Email: agriculture@tskl.net.ki |
| Marshall Islands | Mr Henry Capelle            | Agro-Forestry/Agriculture Officer  
Ministry of Resources and Development, P.O. Box 1722, Marshall Islands 96960 MH |
| Nauru        | Mr Warwick Harris             | Chief Quarantine Officer  
Nauru General Hospital, Denig District, Republic of Nauru. Phone: 674 444 3883 / fax:444 3279. warwick_harris@hotmail.com |
| Niue         | Mr Rodney Alec                | Extension Officer  
Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, Fonuakula, Alofi, Niue. Tel: 683 4032 |
|              | Mr Joe Mahakitau              | Young Farmers Coordinator  
Department of Agriculture, Forestry & Fisheries, Niue Islands. Tel: 683 4032 Fax: 4079 saforeoj@yahoo.co.nz |
| Palau        | Mr Fernando M. Sengebau       | Plant Protection Officer  
Bureau of Agriculture  
P.O. Box 460, Koror, Republic of Palau 96940, Tel: (680) 488-1604  
Fax: (680) 488-1603, 488-1475, E-mail: FFMS@palaunet.com |
|              | Mr Leonard Basilius           | Food Production & Employment Coordinator  
Palau Community Action Agency, P.O. Box 3000 Koror, Republic of Palau 96940, Tel: (680) 488-4909 / 488 1170 Fax: (680) 488-1169 E-mail: IESL@pceaa.org |
| PNG          | Mr. Tony Gunua                | Senior Plant Pathologists  
National Agriculture Quarantine and Inspection Authority (NAQIA), P.O Box 741, Port Moresby, PNG, Tel: (675) 3112100/3112113/3259977, Fax: (675)3251674 PNGNAQS pngnags@dg.com.pg |
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<th>Name</th>
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<th>Organization/Location</th>
<th>Contact Information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>Mr Albert Peters</td>
<td>Principal Crops Research Officer Assistance CEO (Crops Division)</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, P. O. Box 1874, Apia, Samoa. Tel: 685 20605 Fax: 23996</td>
<td><a href="mailto:apeters@lesamoanet.net">apeters@lesamoanet.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms Seletuta Visesio</td>
<td>Project Officer</td>
<td>Women in Business, P. O. Box 720, Apia, Samoa Tel: 685 21959 / 25246 Fax: 21959</td>
<td><a href="mailto:tutas@excite.com">tutas@excite.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>Mrs. Luseane Taufa</td>
<td>Senior Agricultural Officer</td>
<td>Plant Pathology Section, Research and Extension Division, Ministry of Agriculture,</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Taufa.luseanet04@yahoo.co.nz">Taufa.luseanet04@yahoo.co.nz</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr Sam Panapa</td>
<td>National Coordinator for PestNet</td>
<td>Vanuatu Quarantine &amp; Inspection Service (VQIS) PMB 095, Port Vila, Vanuatu. Tel: 678</td>
<td><a href="mailto:sampanapa@yahoo.com">sampanapa@yahoo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ms Olioliga Iosua</td>
<td>Assistant Secretary</td>
<td>Ministry of Natural Resources, Government Office, Vaiaku, Funafuti, Tuvalu. Tel: 688</td>
<td><a href="mailto:oiosua@yahoo.com">oiosua@yahoo.com</a> <a href="mailto:pmre@tuvalu.tv">pmre@tuvalu.tv</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>Mr. Sylverio Bule</td>
<td>Plant Protection Officer.</td>
<td>Vanuatu Quarantine &amp; Inspection Service (VQIS) PMB 095, Port Vila, Vanuatu. Tel: 678</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vqisvila@vanuatu.com.vu">vqisvila@vanuatu.com.vu</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr Redley Tariquiriu</td>
<td>Agricultural Extension Officer</td>
<td>Agriculture Division, Navuti Nduindui, West Penama Province Vanuatu / Agriculture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mr Steven Hazelman</td>
<td>South Pacific Commission</td>
<td>Department Tel: 678 38345/38402 Port Vila 22525</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>Mr Mark Ero</td>
<td>Entomologist</td>
<td>National Agriculture Research Institute, P. O. Box 1691, Boroko, National Capital District</td>
<td><a href="mailto:narikila@global.net.pg">narikila@global.net.pg</a></td>
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<td>Facilitators</td>
<td>Ms Sandra Bernklau</td>
<td>National Consultant</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wilco Liebregts</td>
<td>Pestnet Moderator, PO Box 5406, Raiwaqa PO, 35 Ragg Avenue, Suva, Fiji. Tel/Fax: (679) 3322607</td>
<td></td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:wilco@pestnet.org">wilco@pestnet.org</a></td>
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<td>Dr Vili A. Fuavao</td>
<td>FAO</td>
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<td>Dr Matairangi Purea</td>
<td>FAO</td>
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<td>Mr Tevita Keresoma</td>
<td>FAO</td>
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