

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Farmer Field School

Introduction

In the Solomon Islands, some sustainable land management practices are already carried out, but there is a high level of interest from farmers to improve their knowledge and skills in areas such as soil fertility, reducing impacts of extreme weather, increasing crop mixes and yields and exploring markets for produce.

There are various approaches for improving the knowledge and skills of farmers. One of these is the Farmer Field School, which involves working in a community over time to improve land management practices. Farmer Field Schools are a way to help understand community needs and share knowledge about how to integrate improved practices into existing cropping and plantation systems. The schools can be used to promote more sustainable land management across the Solomon Islands.



Story of John Holland's FFS

“Farm problems are in production and marketing. Farmers need training in skills on agriculture practices and management.”

John's Farmer Field School is located in Gizo, the main centre in the Western Province. Since beginning in 2011, it has been running training for farmers, community members and Rural Training Centre students from communities such as Batuna, Nila, Tabaka and Mabuzu.

Responding to what the farmers and other attendees want to learn, John's school helps equip communities with the skills and knowledge they need to implement sustainable land management practices on their own land.

Details of practice

“Using and maintaining our land as a resource is important not only for us today but for our future generation.” - John

The Farmer Field School is a participatory and interactive learning approach emphasising innovation and problem solving. By aiming to grow farmer capacity to identify and manage their own problems and solutions, it encourages participants to adopt sustainable land management practices suitable to their own farming systems. Farmer field schools can also include a focus on management and marketing, if this is of interest to a community.

John's school trains farmers in some of the best practices for climate-smart agriculture, such as mulching, contour farming, cover cropping and crop rotation. These practices are essential to sustainable land management and improving and maintaining soil fertility, reducing soil erosion and increasing crop yields.

The specifics of John's Farmer Field School training are based on the requests from farmers and Rural Training Centre students. Students and farmers do three to five weeks of training, including practical exercises. These include working with leafy vegetables, fruit trees, root crops and poultry.





What are the benefits?

“The benefits are that students and farmers are equipped with knowledge and skills in production, management and marketing practices.”

Many students who attend John’s Farmer Field School go on to enrol at other institutions for further education. Some have joined the teaching of agriculture at Rural Training Centres and secondary schools, or just in their communities. They apply their skills at home, where they help farmers improve the maintenance and productivity of their land.

What are the challenges?

Farmer Field Schools are not integrated into the education system and are not operated like an educational institution. Support for farmer field schools depends on NGO and government funding. In some cases, the use of farmer field schools also depends on the knowledge and experience of extension workers with this approach.

Farmer Field Schools need to be monitored so that they are aligned to sustainable land management principles and their teaching reflects current global best practices. This requires continual input from governments and NGOs.

The scarcity of usable land can also prove challenging. Farmer field Schools need a physical space for teaching and learning techniques. The production focus on many farmer needs means this usually requires sites for demonstrating techniques.

How could this be scaled up/how can others get involved?

“Sustainable land management is important because we have a growing nation where people will need food in the future, and the only place where we will get it is in our land.”

Securing government support to help with funding and project promotion could help provide Farmer Field Schools to more areas and ensure sustainable land management is more widely promoted. Demonstrating the value of sustainable land management practices could help get more farmers to adopt these practices across the Solomon Islands, engaging more communities and expanding the number of trainers.

