

Project to find a best tomato

By MOFFAT MAMU

THE business of farming tomatoes in the country continues to expand with more local farmers venturing into this crop.

This is because it is generating much money for them when they sold this crop at the market, restaurants, supermarkets, shops, hotels and motels.

There are various species of tomatoes which have been introduced into this country from outside.

As part of a project to find a best suitable tomato variety that can grow well in the country, a pilot project was undertaken in the past months.

As such a research project had been undertaken in partnership between the ministry of agriculture and AVRDC (Asian Vegetable Research Development Center) to find a better variety of tomato suitable for this country.

AVRDC is a world vegetable center, founded as the Asian Vegetable Research Center, with the global headquarter in Taiwan and is the world leading research and development center for vegetable.

The project is funded by the Australia Center of International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). This is through the project called strengthening integrated crop management research in the Pacific Islands in support of sustainable intensification of high-value crop production.

Tikai Pitakia from AVRDC told the Solomon Star that MAL is responsible for agriculture research and development in the country.

And as such AVRDC is collaborating with MAL to conduct field trials, he confirmed.



Farm experts showing how to maintain a tomato plant to some of the visting farmers.

In the past two months a pilot project kicked with the planting of nine varieties of tomatoes. Of the total two are local varieties while most of the others are from Taiwan.

The project was undertaken at a local farm at the Henderson, East Honiara owned by George Ri'ifalu.

The trial was conducted to find out how well some of the tomatoes can be grown with high yield while being

immune from pests and diseases using organic method or chemical and fertilizers.

Throughout the trial period, the tomatoes were under the watchful eyes and observation of Mr Ri'ifalu, Sipae Anistolo, Mr Pitakia, Gilisi Jackson and research officer from the ministry of agriculture & livestock.

Several harvests have been made where the tomatoes are being harvested and sold at the market or

other interested buyers.

During the harvesting sessions, the weight, size and how soon the different tomato varieties can yield have been recorded as part of the research.

The project also took note of how certain varieties can withstand pests and diseases.

Then on Tuesday, as part of the final part of the research a group of farmers

and agriculture officers and experts visited the farm at Henderson to evaluate the nine varieties of tomatoes.

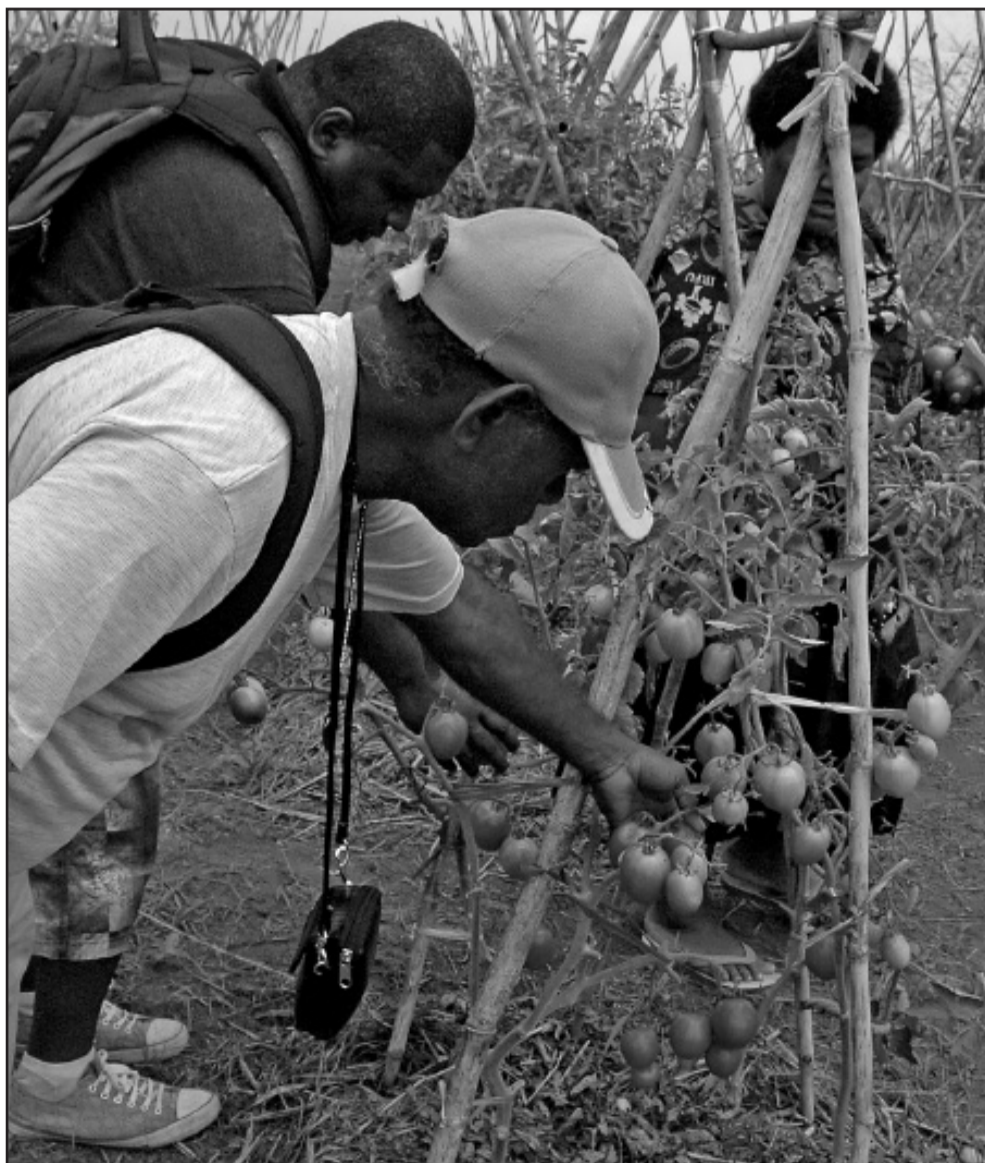
The evaluation was done by allowing the visting farmers and experts to taste the nine tomatoes and grade them according to numbers provided inside the evaluation forms.

The visitors also took time to visit the tomato patch where they get to see how the tomatoes were

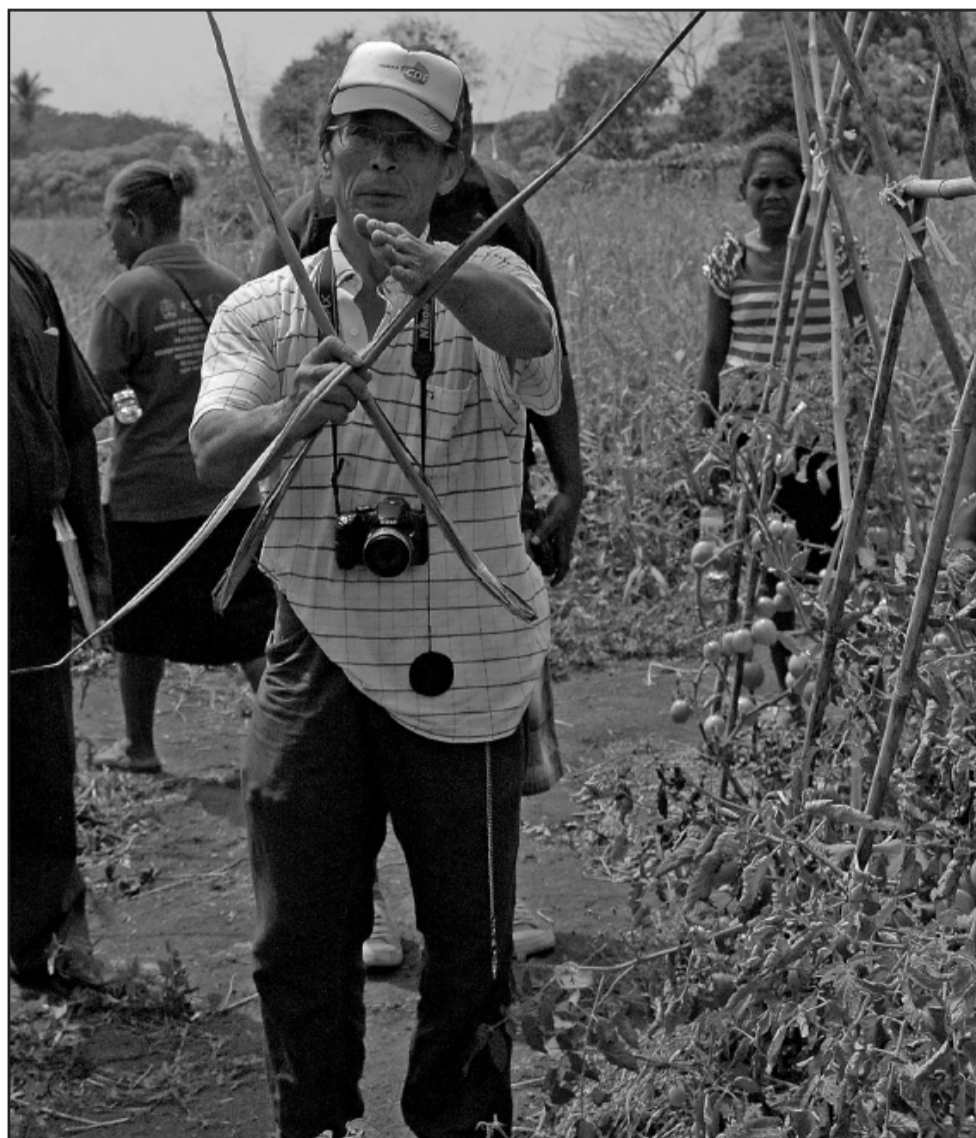
grown, the size of the plant and how many fruits the plants can bear.

Dr. Ellen Iramu from the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock at the occasion explained the development of high-value crops for domestic consumption and export is seen as a priority for economic development and improved livelihoods in many Pacific island countries.

"Most of these countries



Local agriculture experts looking at one of the tomato varieties.



A Taiwanese farm expert from Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) farm explaining to the farmers who to put a proper stalk for a tomato plant.

variety

are heavily dependent on food imports, both for starchy staple foods and for fruits and vegetables, especially to supply increasingly prosperous urban communities and the vital tourist and hospitality markets.

“Dependence on imports varies widely by commodity and country but in most Pacific island countries it ranges between 30 and 80%, in some cases leading to severe trade imbalances

A more promising strategy is to produce high-value crops which can substitute directly for some imports and serve to pay for other, lower-priced commodities.

“Another incentive to produce high-value fruits and vegetables is for their health and nutrition benefits, as non-communicable diseases associated with poor diet are becoming epidemic in the islands.”

Speaking during the field day Mr Ri'ifalu said it was an exciting undertaking to carry out the pilot project.

He said the trial also allowed him to find out which varieties can bear more fruit and bigger sizes.

Mr Pitakia from the AVRDC - world vegetable center further acknowledged all those who have supported the project especially Mr Ri'ifalu for willingly undertaking the project.

“The research was aimed at evaluating improved varieties of solanaceous crops for quality and market potential and extending production seasons.”

As part of the final part of the project MAL and AVRDC invited farmers, seed suppliers, and hotel chefs to attend the field day and helped to evaluate the tomato lines which were grown.

Unfortunately hotel chefs and seed suppliers did not attend the occasion

last week.

“The main purpose of the field day is to conduct an organoleptic test of the tomato lines (9 varieties) evaluated at George's farm. The results will help us to select lines for further promotion.”

Mr Ri'ifalu told the Solomon Star that it would have been better for the seed suppliers to attend the occasion so that they can see the performance of their tomato varieties grown on the field compared with the varieties from AVRDC.

This will help them to supply seeds for the best tomato varieties for the farmers to grow.

Following the evaluation, a report will be produced to find out which tomato variety is best suitable for Solomon Islands which will be recommended to most of the local farmers throughout the country.

A visiting Taiwan Technical Mission (TTM) official also took the opportunity to show the farmers how to do nursery for their tomatoes and how to take care of their tomatoes plant at field while they grow.

One of the farmers speaking to the Solomon Star said the demand for tomatoes in the local market is very high.

As such its important for local farmers to grow more and meet the demand.

The Taiwan technical mission official who was present at the field day said they also plan to supply seeds to local farmers.

He said a nursery centre needs to be set up so that local farmers can visit the centre and buy the seeds at reasonable price.

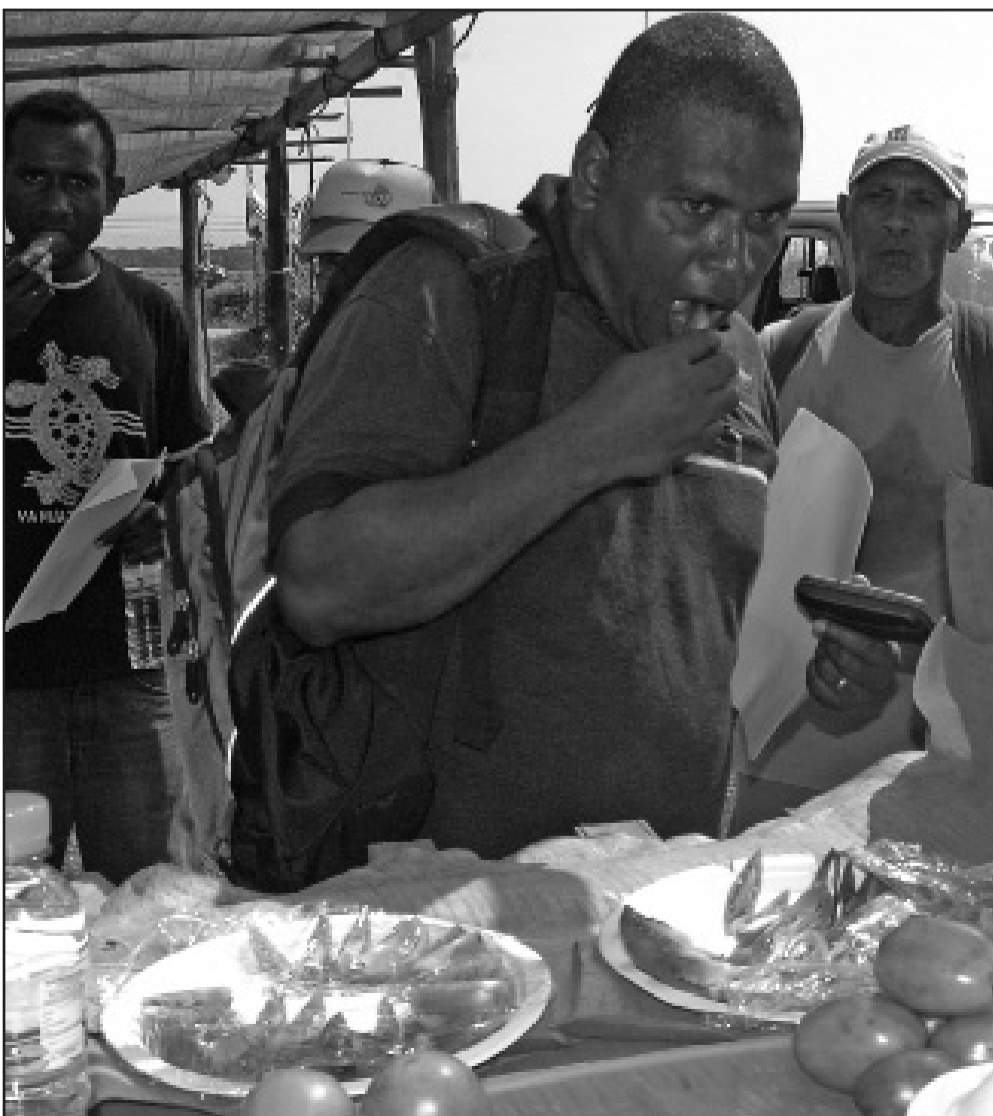
Organisers of the field day expressed satisfaction with the turn out which had been described as a success.



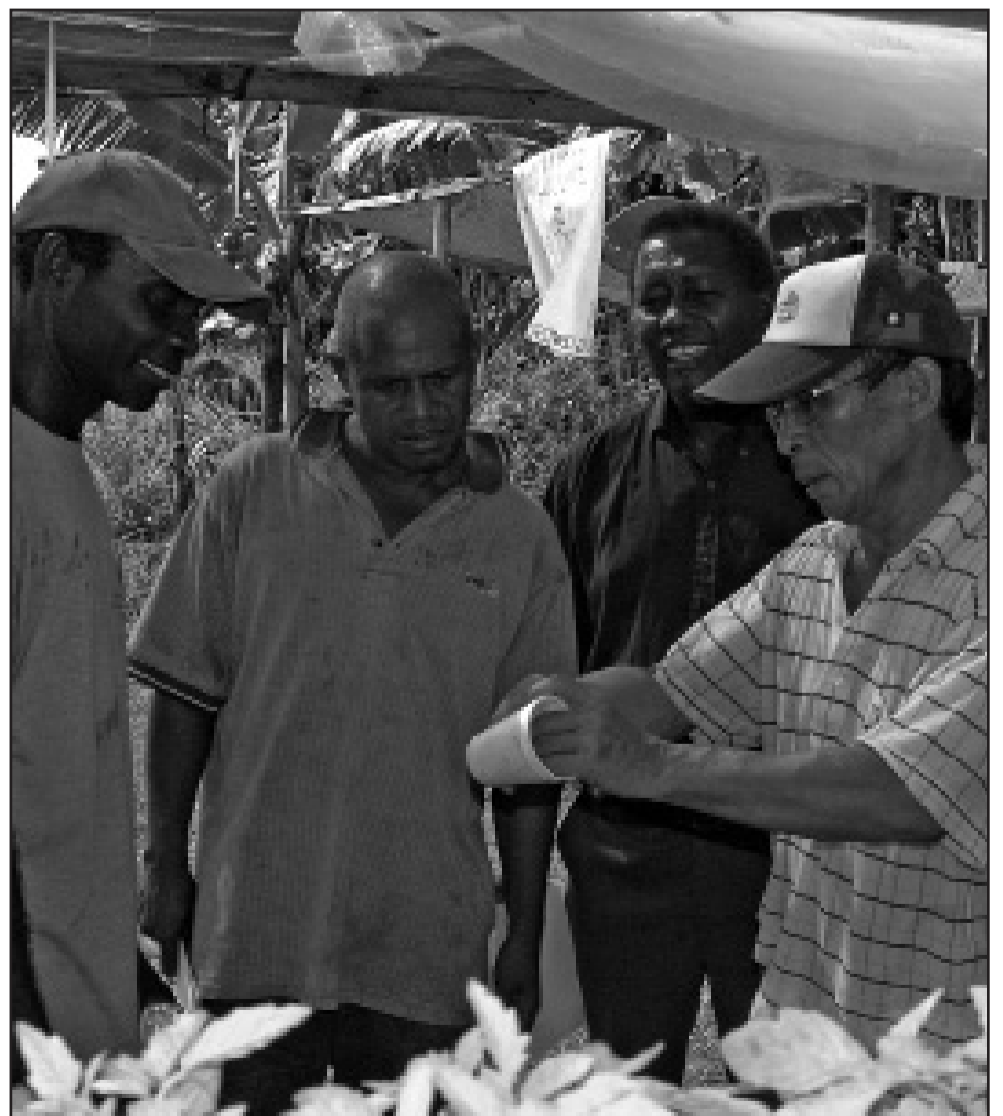
The evaluating of the tomato varieties.



Agriculture experts and farmers evaluating the tomatoes.



One of the visiting agriculturists tasting one of the varieties.



Farmers being shown how to make a simple nursery bag using a cup.