



Chicken tractor used between banana project at Vaitogi Village funded under USDA Western Sustainable Agriculture Research Education (WSARE) held a field day on May 22, 2019.

Farmer: Sagaia Lefe'e

On Wednesday, May 22, 2019 at 9 o'clock American Samoa Community College ACNR Director Aufai Areta, Western SARE Coordinator Dr. Ian Gurr and Ms. Emily, tissue culture technician arrived at the residence of Sagaia Lefe'e for the opening field day for her project. Among the guest list were students from Iakina kindergarten (K4) and their teacher as well as agriculture students from Nuuuli Vocational Technical High School and the agriculture teacher Totoa Currie



The field day was started with opening remarks and a short prayer. After the prayer, farmer Sagaia Lefe'e talked about the project. She mentioned how the project came about. This led to submitting a grant proposal to USDA WSARE. According to Sagaia, the bananas were not doing so well around the area. The bananas were growing like weeds, they were skinny and the bunches were very small and most plants were not producing any good bunches. The farmer wants to produce good banana bunches without the use of commercial fertilizer.

She met with the advisor and discussion began on how to improve the banana plantation using whatever necessary measure to improve it but stay away from commercial fertilizer. Sagaia remembered that her late father raised chickens (local chickens). She also reflected back on how the birds scratched the soil and destroyed insects, especially centipedes. She compared then when there were many chickens roaming the area to the current time when there are no chickens.

The grant was written and was based on using chickens (chicken tractors) to put in between the bananas to improve the quality of soil. In October 2018 the project was funded and the work began. Agriculture extension agent Alfred Peter brought new banana planting materials to replace the old plants. Selection of clean plants were done in the way to make sure there were no sick banana plants. The plants were soaked in a 50/50% Clorox mix before planting.

The chickens were bought from Taputimu chicken farm (old chickens) and were transferred inside the chicken coop that was created specifically for the project. The chicken tractor is built to protect the chicken from predators (dogs) and is supposed to move along the banana row every two weeks. The birds are fed a combination of pig feed and coconut because proper chicken feed is not available. Over time the birds were given other food such as leuceana leaves, bele leaves, and banana flowers – things to increase the protein available. The birds also picked weeds and anything green around and insects in the ground



under the coop.

When the farmer first got the chickens, the birds were so dumb they didn't know how to walk and scratch the ground. The birds were in a confine in cages before they were bought. After two weeks they started scratching the ground and were able to lay more eggs. Laying eggs was another amazing thing the farmer noticed. She now has fresh eggs and her soil has improved. The bananas grow more quickly, flower earlier and seem healthier where the chickens have been working.

The visitors were given a tour of the project. In a perfect script, one of the chickens laid an egg as the kindergarten kids were watching. They all got to hold a warm egg.



Iakina student (K-4) hold fresh egg.

Sagaia wants to invite more people to come and learn from her project. She wants to share what she had learned from the project so other people can benefited from what she has learned over the period of time. If you wish to visited her place please call 256-1348 and arranged the time with her sister. Leave a name and number Sagaia will contact you. Reports are regularly sent to WSARE so they know what is happening in the project. Dr. Ian Gurr is the local representative for WSARE and can help other farmers to develop their own projects. You can contact Dr. Gurr at ASCC ACNR (LGP) at 699 1394.