

The Hon. Joaquim José Gusmão dos Reis Martins, Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries
Ms. Diana Putman, Mission Director, USAID-Timor-Leste
Ms. Nyambura Theuri, Farmer-to-Farmer Program Director, Catholic Relief Services
Mr. David Ringuette, Farmer-to-Farmer Volunteer
Mr. David Palasits, Country Manager, CRS Timor-Leste
Distinguished Guests

Thank you, David, and good morning to all.

I am honored to be with you today to launch an important new United States Government agricultural program in Timor-Leste. USAID's Farmer-To-Farmer program has been connecting U.S. agricultural experts with farmers globally for 34 years now. More than 19,000 U.S. technical advisers have shared their knowledge, skills and culture with farmers in more than 112 countries.

Today, our partner in Timor-Leste, Catholic Relief Services, opens a new chapter of United States support for Timor-Leste by launching Farmer-To-Farmer here. The U.S. GOVERNMENT through USAID and other agencies has been working in agriculture in Timor-Leste since before independence back to Indonesian times. This new chapter of support will connect more than 70 U.S. technical agricultural experts with Timorese farmers over the next five years.

USAID launched Farmer-To-Farmer to:

- Increase agricultural sector productivity and profitability;
- Improve conservation and sustainable use of environmental and natural resources;
- Expand agricultural sector access to financial services; and
- Strengthen agricultural sector institutions

Built on the principle of partnering with Timor-Leste in pursuit of mutual development goals, U.S. government programs, including those in agriculture, contribute to a more prosperous, healthy, democratic and self-reliant Timor-Leste. Since USAID launched the coffee industry in Timor-Leste more than 20 years ago, the U.S. government has invested at least \$125 million in agriculture alone, including help with infrastructure, training, education, research and development, and other technical assistance.

That will continue with Farmer-To-Farmer. Our technical experts will work with a number of large and small host organizations, many of them private, which is a new emphasis on our part to create public/private partnerships that promote free enterprise, resilience and resourcefulness. Farmer-To-Farmer will work with the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, agri-business companies, such as Nova Casa Fresca, promoters of private sector growth, such as TradeInvestTimor, educational institutions, women's cooperatives and, of course, farmers.

The Government of Timor-Leste has identified agriculture as a key driver of economic diversity here. U.S. government programs, whether USAID's Avansa Agrikultura, Farmer-To-Farmer and other programs or the USDA's support of the coffee industry are helping drive commercial agriculture in Timor-Leste to contribute to a vibrant economy. Helping countries in the region prosper is a key pillar of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy.

There's another benefit to Farmer-To-Farmer I want to acknowledge as well. Besides the expertise Americans will bring to Timor-Leste -- a place many of these unpaid volunteers have never heard of -- they will take back with them the rich culture and beauty of the Timorese people and land. We cannot put a price tag on the value of creating friendship between our two countries and our people.

As one Farmer-To-Farmer volunteer from the U.S. state of Illinois said, "My [volunteer] experiences are so rich for me personally, and being able to share the experience with family and colleagues is wonderful thing." That might be one of the most important payoffs of this program -- people understanding each other better and sharing that understanding with others.

So I am proud to be here with you today for this launch ceremony. I thank our host government, particularly the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, and I look forward to witnessing the benefits of Farmer-To-Farmer grow in Timor-Leste over the next five years.

Obrigada barak!

Kathleen M. Fitzpatrick
The United State Ambassador to Timor Leste