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Kiribati Fresh Produce Pathway

The Kiribati Fresh Produce Pathway is an initiative aimed at improving the availability, affordability and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables in Kiribati. It combines two different initiatives to bring together public and private sector stakeholders. One partnership saw PHAMA Plus provide support to the Government of Kiribati to establish new trade pathways, biosecurity protocols and import requirements for agri-food products. This enabled the commencement of trade of fresh produce between Fiji and Kiribati. The other partnership was established between PHAMA Plus and i-Kiribati business Betty Trading Ltd, with stores in Tarawa and Kiritimati, to trial imports of fresh produce from Fiji using the new trade pathway.



PHAMA Plus with staff from the Australian and New Zealand High Commissions in Tarawa showcasing produce imported from Fiji as part of the trial shipments

Why The Fresh Produce Pathway Matters

Kiribati is heavily dependent on food imports, yet only a small portion of these are fresh fruit and vegetables. A sustainable fresh produce pathway can help strengthen Kiribati's food and nutrition security by enabling more reliable access to affordable fruit and vegetables. Retail prices in Tarawa are typically three to four times higher than prices on offer in Fiji. This suggests significant commercial opportunity for Fijian exporters and Kiribati retailers, even when the costs of freight and handling are factored in. Improved access to tropical produce not commonly imported from Australia or New Zealand would also diversify consumer options and support healthier eating. The initiative creates a platform for ongoing cooperation between the biosecurity authorities of both countries, improving biosecurity compliance and strengthening regional trade relationships. More broadly, if losses can be reduced and quality maintained, the pathway could become a sustainable private-sector-led trade flow that benefits farmers, exporters, retailers and Kiribati households alike.

What Was Done to Trial the Pathway

Between May 2024 and May 2025, PHAMA Plus supported the trial of three air-freight consignments of fresh produce to assess feasibility. The first two consignments included a mix of tropical fruit, vegetables and root crops, while the third focused solely on pineapple and watermelon. These trials tested the interest of Fijian exporters, how well the produce could withstand the journey, the consistency of biosecurity compliance, demand at retail level and the indicative profitability of scaling the trade. Although the results were mixed, they showed early signs of commercial potential.

The Results

The trial consignments demonstrated that a viable marketing route between Fiji and Kiribati is achievable, and that retail demand showed potential.

The trial has also created a platform for ongoing cooperation between the biosecurity authorities of both countries, and strengthened partnerships between importers and exporters for ongoing business development.

Analysis shows that losses across all consignments were the main constraint on profitability. Improved packaging and labelling contributed to fewer quality issues and better compliance in the later consignments, although some losses still occurred. Two of the three consignments were successful in securing a small positive margin. However, without losses, the pathway could have delivered a return of 76 percent above the landed cost. The strong price spreads between Fiji and Kiribati retail markets, alongside proven consumer demand, provide additional confidence in the pathway's commercial viability.

The trials highlighted some practical constraints that affected financial profitability:

- losses from biosecurity interceptions,
- deterioration of the quality during handling and transit, and
- reliable availability of air freight space, limiting the size of consignments and related economies of scale.

These constraints will need to be addressed to grow a more reliable and profitable pathway.

The Way Forward

Analysis from the trials indicates that the pathway can become financially sustainable if losses are significantly reduced. With improved handling along the supply chain, greater predictability in cargo loading, strengthened cold-chain facilities and improved biosecurity compliance, margins are likely to remain strong enough for the pathway to sustain itself commercially. As volumes increase, and if treatment facilities and cold storage become available, the pathway could expand to include sea freight for more robust commodities, further reducing costs and improving consistency.

These findings were consistent with reflections from exporters and the Kiribati biosecurity authority. Exporters suggested that more specialised handling was required for perishables during transport and that cold storage be established at Tarawa airport to maintain product quality on arrival. The Kiribati biosecurity authority (Ministry of Environment, Land and Agriculture Development (MELAD)) raised the prospect of adjusting the treatment requirements to improve shelf life.

There is clear appetite among retailers and consumers in Kiribati for fresh tropical produce, and clear willingness among participating Fijian exporters to supply the market. With targeted investments, improved handling procedures and strengthened biosecurity coordination, the Kiribati Fresh Produce Pathway has the potential to grow into a reliable, profitable and ongoing trade link that benefits both countries.

Ongoing collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders in both countries will be critical to improving compliance, refining import requirements and ensuring that future consignments are commercially viable.



Betty Trading selling produce at outlet on Tarawa

Want more information about importing or exporting? Contact your local biosecurity authority:

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