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## World Food Day marked in Honiara



MAL staff entertain at World Food Day.



School students take the lead at World Food Day.

Students, farmers, agriculture partners, stakeholders and the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock marked 2012 World Food Day this year with a march from the Central Market to the Art Gallery in Honiara.

At the Art Gallery close to 100 school children from agriculture classes in Honiara marked the special event with a full day of celebrations, including speeches, music, and the displaying of agriculture produce from the Don Bosco Rural Training Centre and the Taiwanese Technical Farm.

The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Frank Wickham says the 2012 World Food Day theme of Agriculture cooperatives, key to feeding the world is appropriate in Solomon Islands because it falls in line with the Ministry's growing partnership with associations and cooperatives.

"It's about all of us coming together and working together for the greater good.

"Families are facing hardship because of changes in weather, this calls for cooperative spirit to work together to meet communal challenges," said Wickham.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Connelly Sandakabatu says cooperatives and associations can

create enabling environments that can benefit rural people. "Agriculture cooperatives and associations can lead to members helping and supporting each other and, importantly, be a source of recognition for donors and the Government to provide support."

"It has become evident that rural farmers and families are uniting into farm associations and savings clubs to help each other consolidate resources into a single strong voice." Sandakabatu says cooperatives and associations can help move the agriculture sector forward. ●



Don Bosco students showcase their produce and animals.

# The house that honey built

Behind his shy smile Robert Fafale of Dala North in Malaita is a man proud of his honey bees, and even prouder of what honey has done for him.

After 13 years of producing honey, he is reaping the benefits from the lucrative commodity.

He has built a three bedroom raised house and purchased the fittings for his home including three solar panels and the family DVD player from the proceeds of the honey trade.

In an ordinary year he makes around \$78,000 per year from honey – from the 30 hives he and his wife look after in an area roughly the size of a small room.

As a teacher at the Dala North Primary School, Fafale started small with one box that contained two hives, left to him by his father. Thirteen years later, he's grown his hive collection to 15 boxes and his honey is in hot demand with Honiara shops constantly calling him for more supply.

Fafale says bee keeping is not labour intensive and something that anybody with a bit of space and commitment can easily do to generate income.

He counts the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock as a major supporter in getting his bee farm off the ground, with support from the National Honey Development Programme.

Starting with a beginner's course, to training, management and assistance in equipment, MAL has been encouraging him to develop his farm along with the area's 35 other members of the local honey farmers association.

Fafale can either sell his honey directly to the shops – which he packages into small Schweppes bottles, or he can sell it in bulk to Honeycorp.

Harvesting three times a year, MAL officials in Malaita estimate that Fafale produces around 2,250 kg annually from his 30 hives, barring any major weather disturbances.



At home in Dala North, Robert Fafale.



Robert Fafale with his hives.

"Bees can't produce honey when its bad weather or its too rainy, that's when they consume the honey that they make, so there's a lower production during bad weather," said Fafale.

With Honeycorp buying at \$35 per kilogram officials say Fafale earns as much as \$78,750 in a year, if he sells primarily in bulk. His earnings when he sells directly to shops at \$24 per Schweppes bottle is much higher, and is set to grow even higher with the rising price of honey in Honiara.

In terms of maintaining his bees, Fafale says it's not a major task with only him and his wife responsible for looking after the bees, while at the same time continue with his teaching career at the local primary school.

He says the main work involves checking on the bees every two weeks to ensure they are producing honey, and if the progress is slow then various techniques have to be applied to encourage the bees to produce honey.

Fafale has plans to expand the number of hives on his farm but this will depend on the supply of beeswax from Honiara that he needs to construct his next set of boxes.

Right now the future of honey looks very bright with demand far outstripping the supply of honey in the market.

Honey in recent times has also been getting favourable publicity, with even the Ministry of Health encouraging diabetic patients to switch from sugar to honey –thus adding to the demand for honey.

MAL officials say there is also a potential overseas market with Solomon Islands' honey earning a positive reputation, as it is completely organic. But producers have to first meet local demands before looking beyond into the export market.

Honey itself is one commodity that falls in line with the activities of rural people – it can be used as a cash crop to earn money for school fees, yet at the same time not interfere with their normal routine such as gardening and fishing.

According to MAL there is a major potential to develop honey especially in the provinces. ●

## Picture Story: Inter-Ministry Sports

Away from the office and farms the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock have been displaying their talent on the sports field at the Inter-Ministry League.

MAL is fielding a men's soccer team and a women's volleyball team in the annual competition.

Apart from the health benefits in getting staff to be more active, MAL management says the activities have helped to boost Ministerial team spirit and cooperation.

MAL teams acknowledge the support Our Telekom and Tongs Corporation for donating sports gear. ●



## Coffee production makes its mark

Over the past two years the amount of coffee grown in the country has increased from around 90 hectares to 200 hectares under Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock's Arabica Coffee Development Project.

MAL's Deputy Director of Research Martin Jaiki says the increase in acreage will lead to a major boost in Solomon Islands' coffee production within the next 2-3 years.

Coffee is proving to be an attractive crop for highland communities as it grows well at higher attitude where traditional cash crops like coconut or cocoa don't grow well.

"It's a good option for highland communities because they can't grow perishable crops, due to the long transport distance it takes to reach the market. Coffee isn't like that and won't go bad."

Coffee in the Solomon Islands is grown in the highlands of Malaita, Isabel and Guadalcanal.

With coffee selling at \$38 per kilo, and only kava offering a higher price, the Ministry of Agriculture is keen to see coffee farmers succeed. It is providing assistance to get the industry off the ground.

This includes technical advice to farmers, training on growing coffee, as well as a labour subsidy where farmers are paid \$2 for every coffee tree they plant in the field.

"This is an incentive to reward farmers to plant more coffee and to increase production."

The Research Department also carries out field trials.

With an increasing amount of green coffee hitting the

market MAL is supporting buyers by providing working capital to improve their ability to buy coffee from farmers and by assisting with new machines and equipment.

Jaiki says these efforts are part of MAL's intention to develop the coffee industry in the country.

Since its introduction in the late-1980s, Arabica coffee production has not even met local demand, let alone export needs.

The national coffee project is an ongoing programme funded by the Solomon Islands Government and implemented by MAL's Research Department and is scheduled to end this year.

"Coffee is a relatively new crop for farmers, and needs more site specific agronomic data, thus the Research Department was mandated to do the research."

Jaiki says MAL has a good partnership with coffee growers' Associations who have been the real movers behind the coffee industry.

"If we deal with individual farmers it's too difficult to track and monitor each one, plus too much paperwork."

He says the assistance is provided to Associations which then distribute it to their members.

He says the assistance is provided to associations who then distribute it to their members.

The Ministry is only responsible for carrying out monitoring and evaluation to verify the impacts of the assistance and to check the outcomes of the programme. ●

# Chotu's virgin coconut oil goes commercial

On September 22 the country's first commercial loan funded virgin coconut oil mill was launched at Pise in West Guadalcanal.

It was a milestone for the burgeoning industry with Chotu's Coconut Products the first coconut oil mill to get commercial funding from the ANZ Bank, in addition to a grant from the Rural Development Programme's, Component Two.

For 40 years the Chotu family has been involved in the copra trade, but with minimal returns Jack Chotu the owner of Chotu's Coconut Products says it was time to diversify and find a new industry that could utilize the family's coconut plantations.

The operation now joins a network of producers from Malaita, Guadalcanal and Choiseul to supply virgin coconut oil to Kokonut Pacific Solomon Islands for export overseas.

Kokonut Pacific Managing Director, Bob Pollard says the launch marked a major milestone for coconut oil producers in the country.

"It means that the ANZ Bank recognizes that this a profitable business, that's why its supporting this operation. The bank wouldn't give its money if there's no profit," Pollard said at the launch. "For you Jack, this comes with privilege as well



Jack Chotu launches Chotu's Coconut Products at Pise.

as responsibility, if you break down, we'll all suffer, so we are all looking at you to succeed. You have opened the door for other DMEs."

Last year, 70 tonnes of virgin coconut oil, valued at \$2.5million, was exported overseas. This year Kokonut Pacific is expecting to hit over 100 tonnes.

Pollard says the biggest issue faced with exporting coconut oil has been the issue of quality with Solomon Islands facing competition from high quality coconut oil from the world's biggest exporter, the Philippines.

Oil to be exported has to go through a smell and taste test and a free fatty acid test.

Pollard says he has been impressed with the standard of operation and high quality of virgin coconut oil coming out from Chotu's DME with the first batch receiving the same fatty acid content as those coming out of the Philippines.

"This is a great achievement because it sets a high standard for all of us," said Pollard.

Chotu uses coconuts from his family plantation as well as those from other farmers in the area for his mill, otherwise known in the industry as Direct Micro Expelling Unit, or DME.

The coconuts are halved, flesh is scraped and heated before pressed through the oil extractor. The coconut oil is stored in barrels and transported to Honiara.

The whole process from the cutting of coconut to the storage has to happen within one hour to prevent the coconut fermenting and reducing the quality of oil. ●



Coconut oil production line.

## Guadalcanal women the first to receive agriculture funding

Seven women farmers from Guadalcanal, who received \$28,240 in funding, were the first batch of recipients of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme.

The funding will go towards the setting up of projects for coffee, vegetable gardens, poultry, flower growing and ornamental projects on Guadalcanal.

The Women in Agriculture Development Programme was set up this year with the aim of boosting agriculture initiatives in the areas of food production, food processing and nutrition.

In handing over the cheques the Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Connelly Sandakabatu, highlighted the important role of women in agriculture with the 2009 census showing that 59 per cent of women in Solomon Islands are actively involved in the subsistence sector.

"Food security and the livelihood of this nation is heavily dependent on women therefore the need to assist and build the capacity of women in dealing with food production is of great importance," said Sandakabatu.

The women's projects supported include

- Coffee planting projects
- Ornamental business project
- Small-scale commercial vegetable projects
- Poultry project

Sandakabtu says the programme is the first in the history of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock that specifically targets women.

“The feeding of our population of 3 meals a day is a challenge for the Ministry, you, the women of this nation, have been bearing this hard work, therefore rightly the Ministry must assist you.”

Farmer training support from MAL, to teach farmers on how to use the funding and to develop their projects, will



Funding recipients and the MAL Minister Connolly Sandakabatu.

accompany the funding.

Funding for the remaining nine provinces will be distributed later this year. ●

## Local fruits and nuts boost health, food security and income

Indigenous fruits and nuts like the ngali nut (*Canarium indicum*) have long had an important place in the culture and diet of Solomon Islanders.

But a survey three years ago has found that Solomon Islanders are not eating enough local fruit and nuts in their diet, while local plants have come under threat due to increased logging, expansion of settlements and the impacts of climate change.

Over three days, stakeholders in the local fruits and nuts' sector and officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock met in Honiara to draw up a draft policy to promote indigenous fruits and nuts as a source of food security, nutrition and means of income generation for rural dwellers.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock will finalize the draft policy before it goes to Cabinet for endorsement.

The policy will also look at how to revive the export of ngali nuts, which had taken place in the 1990s but has since collapsed.

MAL's Under-Secretary (Technical), Jimi Saelea, says rural dwellers can benefit through the commercialization of local fruits and nuts.

“A policy is important because it will provide us with a guide on how to develop the industry.”

Traditionally, local fruits and nuts such as the ngali nut have high social value and are used for ceremonial events and for barter.

From North Malaita to East Makira, the ngali nut is highly revered in traditional culture and the nut, which is harvested once a year, can be used in bride price ceremonies.

In addition to its cultural value, Saelea says indigenous fruits and nuts have high nutritional value with proven health benefits. He says people need to eat more local fruits and nuts.

Although earlier attempts to commercialize and export



Indigenous Fruits and Nuts Stakeholder meet at the Honiara Hotel.

local fruits and nuts have not been as successful as they have been in neighbouring Pacific countries, Dr Richard Pauku of Maraghoto Holdings says there is a big potential for the sector with big demand from the local and overseas market.

“There is a growing demand. In the past, IFN have been part of food security, now it's developing into a cash crop – that's the trend we've seen over the years.”

Mark Johnston of the Rural Development Programme, Component Two, says it's important that all stakeholders have taken part in the workshop to develop the national policy.

“We need to come up with a way forward for the industry, right from the village growing to production and export.”

If commercialized, Johnston says rural people could have a very good opportunity to improve their standard of living.

The closing of the policy formulation workshop was marked with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between MAL and the Nut Growers Association of Solomon Islands (NGASI), an NGO established to promote and develop indigenous fruit and nuts in Solomon Islands. ●

# Korean volunteers make their mark at MAL



Seung Joo Son and Yum Lee take part in a MAL workshop.

They're thousands of kilometres away from home but for the past two months, Korean volunteers Seung Joo Son and Yum Lee have been settling in to their daily routine at the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock headquarters, and life in Honiara.

Son and Lee are the first KOICA volunteers posted to MAL, both for a one-year assignment. Son, with 18 years of experience at international computer manufacturer Hewlett Packard is MAL's new IT Advisor, while Lee with more than 34 years of experience with the Korean government in the field of accounting and finance is the Finance Advisor.

Life and work in the Solomon Islands is completely different from Korea they told Agrikalsa Nius during a recent interview.

"In Korea we are always in a rush or on the move; here things are a bit laid back, and we are slowly adjusting to

the difference in pace," says Son.

Son is tasked with upgrading MAL's IT network to link the headquarters at Point Cruz with its other branch offices and even its provincial offices. The final stage says Son is to link MAL's network to the government's ICT facility housed in the Ministry of Finance and Treasury, to access a higher broadband network.

"The first step I want to achieve is network stability, that is the Local Area Network stability. Without this we can't go any further. This is essential to implementing the project."

For Lee, his task is to upgrade and standardise the accounting systems in MAL.

"As the Finance Advisor I am gathering information on the budget and accounts, I've also participated in meetings and have familiarised myself with the budget process.

"I also sympathise with the difficulties

faced by the staff such as the poor infrastructure. Sometimes I find a bit of red tape bureaucracy, causing slowness."

With major tasks ahead of them, both Lee and Son are taking it step by step and what they have been appreciative off is the support that they have received from their local counterparts.

"We found people friendly and receptive, and always willing to help," said Son.

Outside the office Son has been using his free time, away from home to learn the guitar.

"I've just started, I practice every day so after one year I should be an expert," he laughs.

For Lee the Honiara Golf Club has been his refuge on weekends. It's a great place to meet all sorts of people in Honiara, all sorts of people from the community so it's a good place to meet people and make friends.

After years of service in the Korean government and in the private sector – both Son and Lee who are in retirement say they want to give back and contribute their skills to the world, hence the decision to become volunteers.

"It was about contributing back by utilising my IT background," says Son.

Asked why they selected Solomon Islands out of the 40 countries that KOICA operates in, they said it seemed far away and they wanted to know more about the country.

Son and Lee say they are proud of the work they are doing at MAL. ●

## Champions of change

As part of its drive to improve leadership within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, senior officers within the Ministry took part in a leadership for change training organized by the Institute of Public Affairs and Management in September. The workshop that is IPAM's second

intake or cohort, aims to develop the next generation of leaders within the Public Service, focusing on change management.

David Patternot (Under-Secretary (Administration)), William Okekini (Chief Planning Officer), Hendrick

Nonita (Principal Accounts Officer) and Edwin Vovose (Principal Administration Officer) took part in training that brought together officers at management level from Ministry of Finance and Treasury, Ministry of Public Service, Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development and

MAL to assess leadership challenges within their respective ministries.

The Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Eliam Tangirongo, said change is needed now in the Public Service and he called on training participants to become the champions of change.

"There is no substitute for an effective public service that can deliver services to the people of Solomon Islands.

"This calls for quality leaders – I believe

I am talking to a number of good quality leaders."

The training included a research assignment on leadership challenges in MAL that helped participants know where they fit in the bigger picture and learn that strong leadership is important for successful and sustainable change.

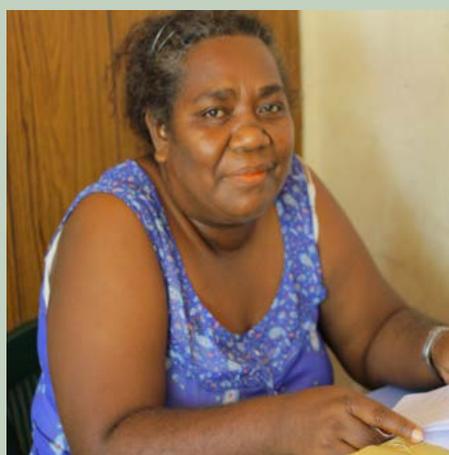
The research findings were presented to the sponsoring Permanent Secretaries and invited guests, at a

forum organized by IPAM.

In reflecting on his learning, Nonita from MAL said the training helped him to analyse the work of the Ministry and the wider leadership issues facing the country.

"One key concept learned from the course is that awareness is the birthplace of all possibilities." ●

## Staff Profile – Quarantine's Irene Nanau



Irene Nanau

With more than 20 years of agriculture experience under her belt, and having worked her way up through a male dominated organization, Irene Nanau stands today as the head of the Quarantine's Market Access Unit.

The unit is responsible for dealing with and facilitating the export of Solomon Islands commodities overseas as well as imposing international protocol on imports coming into the country.

When she first started there were very few women in the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and she was a lone woman in the Quarantine section.

Today the situation has drastically improved and she is one of 14 women in Quarantine and amongst many now in MAL.

Since joining the Ministry in 1985 she has met and overcome many challenges always believing in her ability to do her job well.

Her advice to young women wanting to make their mark in the Ministry or in Quarantine is to up-skill and focus on improving their qualification, in such a technically demanding line of work.

With a degree in applied horticulture from Australia and a post graduate degree in Plant Health and Protection from Greenwich University at the School of Natural Resources in the UK, when she speaks her words are backed by her years of experience and qualifications.

But it wasn't always like this, in her first 10 years on the job Nanau found it hard to be taken seriously by male colleagues, particular her seniors.

When she returned with her postgraduate degree from the United Kingdom, she noticed a shift in attitude.

"They begin to listen and gradually seek out my opinion when I came back. Because of this I was given the challenge of making decisions."

Being transparent open, honest and upfront with colleagues, male or female is her other advice to those wanting to climb the ladder.

"Your relationship with your colleagues is important – be it good news or bad news you have to be upfront, reasonable especially if you are a woman, you can't back down or be non-confrontational because that will be a setback in this line of work."

Nanau says working at Quarantine comes with an attitude, passion

and where cultural niceties do not have a place because you deal with stakeholders, export /import entrepreneurs, traders, logging investors and researchers.

"You have to be confident in your approach because you are expected to be vigilant. If I'm shy and timid I wouldn't be able to work in this organization."

For Nanau her proudest achievement has been the establishment of the Market Access Unit within Quarantine, which was set up after her return from studies in the United Kingdom in 2008.

"This is a milestone for Quarantine because this office opened up a very important area for the country by addressing the quarantine concepts on trade related issues whether it be on international trade or domestically approached trade mechanism. Facilitating trade in one of Quarantine's major roles, one that has a direct impact on the country's revenue and earnings.

The other achievement she is proud of is the development of the Market Access Policy Strategy that was developed with the help of Technical Advisor Dr Dale Hamilton.

Market Access Unit is one of the few units within Quarantine that has its own strategy, it will be finalized soon and it will be important to our future in guiding the work of quarantine – market access in Solomon Islands." ●

# Pineapple report

An assessment report on pineapple production in Malaita has recommended the start of the export of pineapples to Australia and the setting up of a jam processing factory in Honiara and a juice factory in Auki.

The report by the Marketing Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock assessed pineapple farmers on the South Road between the areas of Arabala and Sinasu, as a result of a request from pineapple buyers in Australia.

The assessment team led by Principle Planning Officer (Marketing Unit), Noel Roposi found that farmers are producing upto 10,400 fruits per year, with the main seasons between January to June and September to December with the peak harvest taking place between October to December.

The report said that pineapples examined by the team were disease free with all but two farmers using fertilizer on their plants.



But the team found that a lack of markets for farmers has led to a decline in production and the abandoning of pineapple farms.

Farmers complained of an oversupply of pineapple at Auki Market and in Honiara during the peak season and called for the setting up of a jam-making facility and a juice factory. ●

# Survey to gauge national food security

The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, under its Women in Agriculture Development Programme, will conduct a national food security survey.

The Minister of Agriculture and Livestock, Connelly Sandakabatu, says the survey will determine the level of food security in the country.

The Ministry has allocated \$135,000 to conduct the survey out of the \$2.5million allocated to the Women in Agriculture Development Programme for 2012.

"The Government is worried and so too is the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock about food security with the situation we are facing from logging and sea-level rise associated with climate change.

"We need to know the details and the data; we need to determine the baseline."

With the increasing population growth rate of 2.8 per cent, the minister says the Government is finding it a major challenge to feed the population three meals a day.

Sandakabatu says with no data yet collected on food security it is important that the Ministry and the Government has information on the situation in homes across the country.

"That is why we are reserving a chunk of money to come out of the Women in Agriculture Development Programme to carry out a random survey on households.

"It will help us have a programme that is ours; one that addresses the needs of the day, and the needs of women folk in the country."

He called on the public especially at village level to participate and support the survey, so that the Ministry can develop the right approach to deal with food security. ●



## Correction

From Issue 3 of Agrikalsa Nius for the story Agriculture Partner: Kokonut Pacific.

Kokonut Pacific's Operations Manager Wilson Kikolo was quoted as saying that KP pays \$10,000 per year to be certified by the National Association of Sustainable

Agriculture of Australia.

The correct figure should have been AUD\$10,000.

We apologise for the mistake and any inconvenience this may have caused. ●

# New weapon to battle the taro beetle

Once a major staple crop, taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) had almost disappeared from the plates of Solomon Islanders due to the widespread damage caused by the taro beetle (*Papuana sp.*).

Now with the use of chemical treatment taro is making a comeback.

Amongst the first to benefit have been farmers in Santa Cruz, with the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock's Research Department reporting an increase in taro production as a result of chemical control.

The use of the two treatments – Confidor and Mustang is being encouraged with the Ministry providing training for farmers on how to apply the treatment.

Demonstration plots were set up in Temotu, Guadalcanal and the Western Province to show farmers the benefit of the treatment. ●



## Pumpkin Curry Recipe

### Ingredients

- 1 medium sized pumpkin
- 2 dessertspoons salted water
- ¼ teaspoon saffron powder
- ½ teaspoon chilli powder
- 4 onions sliced
- 2 bulbs garlic chopped
- 10 pepper seeds
- 1 cup thick coconut milk
- 1 teaspoon mustard seed ground
- 2 dessertspoons scraped coconut
- 1 dessert spoon raw rice

### Method

- Cut the pumpkin into ½ inch cubes with skin on. Wash and place in spacious saucepan with all ingredients other than the ground mustard seeds and coconut milk. Cover and boil.
- When all the water is absorbed, blend the ground mustard seeds, scraped coconut and rice with about ¼ cup of water or thin coconut milk and spread on the pumpkin curry. Do not cover. Simmer for a while, and add the thick coconut milk. Bring to boil without covering.
- Note: Do not cover as the mustard will become bitter.

**For more information on stories in this newsletter or agriculture enquiries contact the Agriculture Information Unit within the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock.**

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For the latest agriculture news and stories catch Famas Kona every week on the national broadcaster SIBC at 8.30pm on Monday and 7.30pm on Wednesday.

The Agriculture Information Unit is the public relations arm of the Ministry of Agriculture & Livestock. Its role is to disseminate agriculture information to the public and farming communities using radio, newspapers, television, online and print media.

### Library

The Solomon Islands National Agriculture Information Centre is now open.

The library has a major collection of books and information on Solomon Islands agriculture. Members of the public and students are encouraged to visit the library for information on agriculture in the Solomon Islands and around the world.

### Opening hours

**Monday & Wednesday**

**1:30pm - 4:00pm**

**Friday**

**9:00am - 11:30am**