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PRESS RELEASE

Consumer Council Raises Alarm Over Sale of Defective Sidha Packs

A prominent and notorious supermarket in Makoi is under the spotlight again, after it was caught selling expired and infested Sidha packs in the lead up to the festive season. The Consumer Council of Fiji has condemned the supermarket's actions, urging businesses to avoid using religious occasions as a platform to market substandard goods. Sidha packs, commonly purchased by Fijians for use in pooja for religious offerings, were found to include expired food items, weevil-infested ingredients, and rotten fresh produce, raising concerns about the potential health risks associated with these products especially as the country approaches the Diwali season.

A joint inspection conducted by the Consumer Council and Nasinu Town Councils' Health Inspectors confirmed that several Sidha packs contained expired products, including oil with an expiry date of March 2024, as well as potatoes and other fresh items that were deteriorated. Some products such as dhal, sugar, and rice were sold without proper labelling or expiry dates, making it difficult for consumers to assess their safety. Alarming, during the inspection, the Council also discovered that pre-packed sugar, labelled as 1kg, actually weighed only 824 grams, misrepresenting the quantity sold to customers.

Consumer Council of Fiji CEO Seema Shandil emphasized the gravity of the situation, stating, "It is unacceptable for supermarkets to sell expired, mislabelled, or poor-quality products to consumers. These actions not only violate the Food Safety Act but also expose the traders' greed, as they exploit consumers by attempting to offload old stock, especially during an important cultural and religious period like Diwali."

In addition to the issues with Sidha packs, the inspection uncovered several recurring concerns at the supermarket, including damaged packaging, substandard fresh produce, and compromised frozen meats. Among the flagged items were rotten onions, thawed chicken, wilted vegetables, and discolored sausages, as well as multiple products without expiry dates. Weevils were also found in various dhal and spice items, including Moong and Chana Dhal. Moreover, significant hygiene issues were identified, such as the presence of flies, dusty shelves, and spider webs inside some product containers.

Shandil has strongly condemned the conditions discovered during the inspection, stating, "It is clear that this supermarket is showing a blatant disregard for the Food Safety Act and the various Regulations under the Act that prohibits the sale of expired and unsafe food. This is not the first time they have been caught engaging in such practices. This is an indication that the current penalties are not acting as a strong deterrent, and whilst the supermarkets are fully aware about the requirements under the Food Safety Act, they continue to knowingly violate it," added Ms Shandil.

The Council has initiated steps to get the affected products removed from the supermarket's shelves and will continue to work closely with Municipal Councils and the Ministry of Health to ensure that the store addresses these violations. The Council encourages consumers to inspect products carefully, particularly during the festive season as there will be an increased demand for religious offerings and pre-packed food items and report any similar incidents

For further information or to lodge a complaint, consumers can contact the Consumer Council of Fiji via its toll-free National Consumer Helpline 155, or through complaints@consumersfiji.org.