

**Friends of Lolote, Castlemaine**  
**Update – February 2016**  
**The Hub Plot and Sustainable Agricultural Training in Dili.**

Ten Lolotoe young people and the Sub-District's Agriculture Extension Worker were able to attend a sustainable agriculture training program through funds and support from Castlemaine's the Hub Plot and Mount Alexander Shire's Friends of Lolotoe group. The group of eleven travelled to a Permascout camp which included training in sustainable agriculture practices and approaches. Ego Lemos, the founder of East Timor's PERMATIL (Permaculture) organisation led the training. A key message of the Permascout camp was to encourage young people to build local movement for sustainable farming, with the aim of ensuring the long term viability of agricultural development in East Timor.

East Timor faces a challenge in its Agricultural development sector as practices encouraged through various aid groups can deliver less than sustainable approaches. While completing his Master's study at Melbourne's Victoria University, Ego Lemos became convinced that anything less than sustainable practices in Timor Leste could threaten the nation's fragile ecosystems and undermine its tenuous land structures. He returned from his study empowered to build a movement to support sustainable practices, to strengthen Timor-Leste against climate change and to resist the imposition of industrial agricultural practices that are less than optimal in his homeland.

Lolotoe is a mountainous and isolated district of people who live sustainably with the majority growing their own food for day-to-day existence. Agricultural development is desperately needed to help these farmers make better use of their land, to grow crops to avoid the annual hungry season (wet season), and to enable farmers to gain some small income from their farming through the selling of surplus goods. Currently roads in the region are so damaged and so few people have appropriate transport that accessing local markets is impossible. As well as under-development, climate change is beginning to impact the region with the late arrival of rains reducing growing periods. Isolation also brings its own problems in that the people of Lolotoe are unable to access support from NGO's and Government programs. At times it appears the region is ignored with many of these programs simply because shocking road conditions makes access almost impossible.

The group of eleven travelled by government car and by bus from Maliana. Paul, Lolotoe's Agriculture Extension worker who attended the Permascout camp, described the training as extraordinary. He used the local term 'diak la halimar' which literally means – I'm not joking, it was amazing. For him the key points were: the use of shading in vegetable growing to conserve water, the need to take flowers from around the house and replace these with vegetables for daily consumption and to use a range of sustainable practices learned at the training. He is already putting these into practice in his own garden.

Since returning the attendees have continued to meet regularly in Lolotoe and share together on implementing the ideas they have learned. The group has future plans to offer training in these practices to others in the region and to encourage a local movement for sustainable agriculture to develop.