

With Aid, Afghan Farmers Reap Good Harvests

KABUL, Afghanistan—When USAID's Afghan mission reopened in January, 2002, its staff found the legacy of two decades of war plus four years of drought: dried-up wells, parched farm land, dead livestock, and a collapsed rural economy.

In short, Afghanistan's food production capacity was greatly eroded.

"The issue when we came in was: Do we treat the country as a famine country, or are we going to rely on the ability of the farmers of Afghanistan to grow their own food?" said Ray Morton, who worked on the agriculture program through June 2003.

In the end, the program did both.

Providing food was the first priority, but USAID also jumpstarted wheat farming, trained fertilizer dealers, and saw local village organizations or *shuras* begin rebuilding irrigation systems, roads, and schools.

Working with the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, USAID imported 3,500 metric tons of high-quality wheat seed from neighboring Pakistan for the first planting, relying on local farmers to use their own produce for the second planting six months later.

At the same time, the International Fertilizer Development Corporation (IFDC), based in Muscle Shoals, Ala., distributed 16,700 tons of fertilizer to almost 180,000 Afghan households to double or triple their wheat yields.

Over two harvests, these inputs helped generate about 78,000 additional tons of

wheat—enough to feed about 450,000 Afghans for a year.

In 2003, Afghan farmers produced some 4 million tons of wheat, or 80 percent of the best prewar harvests.

Expectations for next year's harvest are even higher, as Afghanistan will probably grow more than 4 million tons of wheat, said Dr. Amit Roy, president of IFDC.

New orchards were planted, and a credit voucher scheme was started to help farmers buy seeds or fertilizers. The vouchers were repaid after harvest, either in cash or three 50-kilo bags of wheat.

The *shuras* are using the loan repayments to fix electricity plants, irrigation canals, and roads.

Under the emergency program, IFDC trained more than 800 fertilizer traders—importers, wholesalers, and retailers—about the proper use of fertilizer, basic agronomy of key crops, and the basics of marketing. Now the training efforts are expanding, and trained dealers are expected to pass on their knowledge to farmers.

Additional programs emphasize crop and



Afghan farmers turn in credit vouchers to obtain fertilizer. The vouchers are repaid after the harvest, either in cash or bags of wheat.

IFDC

livestock productivity, as well as agricultural technology and market development.

When the emergency program ended in September, long-term projects began, such as training farmers and teaching fertilizer dealers how to compete in a free market.

Other work continues on other reconstruction efforts to rebuild roads and

irrigation systems.

But rebuilding Afghanistan's agriculture sector, which employs about 85 percent of the population, is not easy. For example, land mines riddle once productive fields, preventing farmers from working their lands. ★

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