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In Turkmenistan, USAID Brings New Opportunities to Farmers and Students

Posted by [Denise Rollins, Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, Asia Bureau](#) on Thursday, November 10th 2011

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In my 24 years with USAID, I have served around the world but somehow had never made it to the former Soviet Union – until last month. So it was with great excitement that I anticipated my first visit to Central Asia, eager to learn more about the region and our programs there.

The most memorable part of the trip was visiting USAID projects in [Turkmenistan](#) during my first three days in the region. I visited the historical city of Mary (Mar-ree), a caravan city in southeastern Turkmenistan on the original Silk Road about an hour's flight from the capital, Ashgabat. In the Mary region, USAID is funding a well-received Agricultural Technology Project that works to increase the agricultural productivity of small greenhouse farmers, by providing technical assistance and training in new greenhouse technology. I toured various greenhouses in the region, including some that USAID has helped rehabilitate. From what I was told, the yield of various crops (mainly tomatoes, cucumbers, lemons, etc.) has doubled in the rehabilitated greenhouses. Techniques used include raised roofs, improved heating systems, better irrigation techniques, and more appropriate fertilizer usage.

The farmers all credit the USAID training for giving them the opportunity to improve their skills and earn higher incomes for their families. In a country where the vast majority of the agricultural sector (indeed, the entire economy) is state controlled, I was impressed by the local farmers' thirst for information and their willingness to invest their own time and money.

My second stop in Mary was to the city's first-ever bovine Artificial Insemination Center. USAID's Agricultural Technology Project is also working to reintroduce high-quality bovine artificial insemination in Turkmenistan, which has not been practiced since Soviet times. When paired with training in basic herd management, improved cattle stock will greatly increase dairy production, and with it improve the livelihoods of farmers. In fact, I learned that we expect dairy production to increase by at least four fold in the first year of the project – which will be the result of improved feed and basic animal care alone, as the first calves from the artificial insemination process will not be born until later this year.

The most nostalgia-inducing site visit I made in Turkmenistan was to the Junior Achievement program, of which I am an alumna myself. The visit brought back

Credit: Andrew Segars/USAID



Farmers in Mary attend a USAID-supported agricultural training session. Photo Credit: USAID

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wonderful memories of youthful enthusiasm for new knowledge (which I still have, of course!). I was impressed to learn that a Junior Achievement team from Turkmenistan won the first-ever [Junior Achievement Asia Pacific Company of the Year Competition](#), a three-day competition designed to nurture an entrepreneurship spirit and business skills in secondary school students. The winning company, Cozy Care, developed an innovative portable cushion and achieved a profit within a period of five months.

Overall, the Junior Achievement program has been an overwhelming success in Turkmenistan, with approximately 20,000 participants a year. Going forward, its materials on business education, entrepreneurship, and economics are being adopted by Turkmenistan's educational system, thus reaching the entire student population.

I have heard from others that a visitor may leave Central Asia, but Central Asia never leaves her. Now I know what they mean – and I am already eager for my next visit to this fascinating region.

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