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Kazakhstan: Preserving Asia's Bread Basket

Posted by [Ashley King, USAID/CAR Environmental Officer](#) on Monday, April 22nd 2013

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During Earth Week, we're exploring the connections between climate change and the environment we depend on to sustain us. We start in Kazakhstan, the breadbasket of Central Asia and Afghanistan.

"Ас атасы – нан" – *Bread is the head of all foods, Kazakh Proverb*

Bread is the lifeblood of the Central Asian diet, so changes in the price and availability of wheat can have significant impacts on food security in the five Central Asian Republics and [Afghanistan](#). In [Tajikistan](#), for example, more than 50% of daily caloric intake comes from bread. While all the countries grow at least a little wheat, it is [Kazakhstan](#)—the world's 7th largest wheat exporter—that occupies the central role in providing this critical staple crop to the entire region.

Yet, [climate change](#) is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of droughts in the wheat growing regions, increase extreme temperature events, and change seasonal precipitation patterns. These changes could significantly threaten Kazakhstan's ability to serve as the region's breadbasket. Climate change is expected to exacerbate



Bread is the centerpiece of the Central Asian diet. Photo credit: USAID

challenges to [food security](#) by reducing water availability—critical for agriculture—and increasing natural disasters like droughts and floods. Harvests during drought years in Kazakhstan can be as much as six times smaller than harvests during normal years!

Despite these known trends, there is very little local awareness or concern about climate change in the region. While the Government of Kazakhstan has taken a progressive stance reducing the emissions of the greenhouse gases that cause climate change, adaptation to climate change is still a relatively new concept.

USAID is partnering with UNDP and a host of international experts and organizations to improve the climate resiliency of Kazakhstan wheat and Central Asian food security. The goal of our project is to catalyze the process of adaptation in Kazakhstan's wheat sector, while also opening a regional dialogue around the challenges of climate change to Central Asian food security.

As the weather becomes more unpredictable and extreme in Kazakhstan's wheat regions, climate information services that enable farmers, processors, and policymakers to take proactive measures are essential to lessening the harm of this

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Flour has been a staple of food assistance to Kyrgyzstan, where over 700,000 people have been provided with humanitarian assistance from USAID since 2006. Photo credit: USAID

increasing variability. USAID's program is focusing on improving the understanding of expected climate impacts on wheat in Kazakhstan and developing the capability to provide critical information to key audiences. Our program is also working with the government, the private sector and the research community to mainstream resilience to climate change into their decision making processes, so the growth of

the wheat sector in Kazakhstan happens in a way that withstands the changes climate change will bring.

The other Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan – the primary importers of Kazakh wheat – must also be prepared to respond the impacts of climate change outside their own borders. We're bringing these countries and Kazakhstan together to discuss risk mitigation strategies that can be taken at a national and regional level to buffer the region against the impacts of climate change on wheat production and food security.

Together with our partners inside and outside the region, USAID is working to ensure that the people of Central Asia and Afghanistan will have a stable, affordable supply of wheat far into the future. The respect accorded to bread and the role it plays in food security is too important to ignore.

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