



# FAS WORLDWIDE

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## Programs and Opportunities

### USDA Makes Important Contributions To Help Rebuild Afghanistan's Agricultural Sector

By Linda Habenstreit

In addition to nearly a decade of drought, the people of Afghanistan have suffered from war and civil unrest for nearly 25 years. Since late 2001, when a process for political reconstruction was established, the Afghan people have been trying to rebuild their country and their lives. The United States and its allies are working together with the Afghan people to help them create a democratic society and a stronger market-based economy.

USDA is doing its part to help Afghanistan rebuild from the bottom up. Because agriculture serves as the foundation on which nearly all developing countries build their economies, USDA is providing aid and assistance to help Afghanistan revitalize its agricultural sector so it can become an engine for economic growth.

Among USDA's many efforts and programs, the FAS Project Development and Management Center is coordinating the assignment of USDA and land-grant university employees to provide technical assistance to Provincial Reconstruction Teams and the Afghan Conservation Corps. These employees contribute their talents, expertise and experience to a range of activities—from planning and implementing reconstruction and agricultural development projects to providing training and thousands of jobs in projects to restore soil and water resources.

FAS Worldwide talked with Mark Holt, manager of the Project Development and Management Center, to find out how his staff is drawing on the broad resources and unique capabilities of USDA and land-grant employees to support this important and challenging work.

#### **FAS Worldwide: What is a PRT (provincial reconstruction team)?**

**Holt:** A PRT is a unit of about 60-100 military personnel. About half of the individuals in the unit are devoted to security, while the other half handles civil affairs. These individuals are reservists, who bring their civilian skills and expertise with them. They may be bankers, engineers or business owners—all kinds of professions. Several U.S. government agencies have people in PRTs—the U.S. Department of State, USAID (the U.S. Agency for

International Development) and USDA for example. Other agencies, like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, may participate in the future.

#### **FAS Worldwide: How many PRTs are there and where are they located?**

**Holt:** There are 19 PRTs in various regions of the country. Some of these areas are high risk, while others are lower risk. Risk is determined based on how secure the area is, but it's relative because risk is everywhere.

The U.S. government, the United Nations and other sources help re-evaluate the level of risk in each part of the country on a regular basis. USDA relies on these sources to decide where people should be deployed, staying out of hostile areas whenever possible. If our people are traveling into a higher risk area, the PRT commander determines the level of protection needed before the mission goes out.

We do everything we can to protect USDA employees, and the military does everything it can. USAID provides protective equipment such as helmets and Kevlar vests and USDA provides communication equipment such as satellite phones. But we try to avoid putting people in the highest risk areas in the first place.

#### **FAS Worldwide: What do USDA personnel do on PRT assignments?**

**Holt:** Since only one USDA employee is attached to each PRT, these folks

have to be jacks-of-all-trades agriculturally. Although each person brings a specific set of skills to the table, they must be able to address different situations. For example, there are animal health issues in every province. If a USDA person in a PRT is not a veterinarian, he or she contacts one in another PRT and arranges for that person to come to his or her village to conduct an animal health clinic and administer vaccinations.

Our people work together on any number of projects—from tree plantings to animal clinics to village meetings—and the military supports their efforts, while keeping them safe and secure.

### **FAS Worldwide: How are individuals chosen for these assignments?**

**Holt:** We have asked every USDA agency to submit names of qualified employees. Each individual must qualify for a security clearance and pass a rigorous medical examination. Individuals serve on a PRT for six months at a time. These PRTs are not necessarily staffed and run by the United States. Our people have staffed PRTs led by New Zealand, Germany and Great Britain.

Several people have volunteered to go back again after their assignments end. For example, a livestock specialist completed his six-month assignment and returned to the United States. He developed a three-month animal health program and will be returning to Afghanistan to run it. Most agencies pay the salary and benefits of their employees while they are out in the field. FAS pays for their equipment, food, housing and transportation to and from Afghanistan. Funding comes from FAS and from the Department of State.

Employees from USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Food Safety and Inspection Service, the Agricultural Marketing Service, Rural Development, the Forest Service and the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service have served on PRTs.

### **FAS Worldwide: How long has USDA been providing people to PRTs?**

**Holt:** The first group went to Afghanistan in August 2003. By Feb. 16, 2005, we had 12 people in the country. Nine people have already completed their six-month assignments. We will continue to staff the PRTs as long as the Afghan government needs this type of long-term technical assistance.

We also will continue to provide short-term technical assistance using USAID funding. For example, through USAID's in-country program of agricultural development, we are providing institutional capacity building to Kabul University and its colleges of agriculture and veterinary sciences in Kabul

and its five other agricultural colleges around the country. Our people are serving as technical resources and plan to provide specialized training to university faculty in areas such as fertilizer management, animal husbandry, plant and animal disease control and sanitary and phytosanitary standards.

Another activity in which we are involved is the Afghan Conservation Corps. The Department of State and USAID are funding conservation training under this program, which is operated by the United Nations Office of Project Services. This multi-donor, multi-agency effort is beginning to bear fruit.

The program creates work for returning refugees, internally displaced persons, women and ex-combatants. These people may have limited skills, but need to support their families. The Afghan Conservation Corps hires them for \$2 a day, enough to pay for basic necessities.

We are training these individuals in nursery management, reforestation, soil stabilization and water conservation. They are replanting forests and pistachio trees, which grow well in the Afghan climate. The hope is that eventually this will lead to increased agricultural productivity, which can reduce hunger, improve nutrition and health, elevate living standards and spur economic growth. When these changes take place, Afghanistan and its people will be able to enter the international marketplace and participate in the global economy.

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## USDA Employees Accomplish Much in Afghanistan

While assigned to PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) or the Afghan Conservation Corps, USDA employees have made great strides in helping the Afghan people. Here are some stories of their success.



*Dr. Mahmood Ramzan, a veterinarian with USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service, examines one of the white leghorn chicks distributed to Afghan families in Kandahar province.*

### Chicks Give a Leg-Up to Afghan Families

—Dr. Mahmood Ramzan, a veterinarian with USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service, determined that the quickest way to lower nutritional deficiencies and raise family income was to distribute White Leghorn chicks imported from Pakistan to Afghan families in Kandahar province.

On January 15, families selected by Afghanistan's Ministry of Agriculture received 30 chicks, medicine, 200 pounds of feed and instructions in Pashtun, the province's native dialect. A Ministry of Agriculture trainer visited each family to mentor them in raising the birds for slaughter or sale in the local market.



*The white leghorn chick at left is part of an effort to combat hunger and poverty in southeastern Afghanistan. At right, white leghorn chicks gather around feed provided under a poultry revitalization project in Kandahar province.*



"Poultry is a good replacement for large animals whose numbers have dropped 60 percent due to drought and war," said Dr. Ramzan. In addition, it takes six months to one year to raise sheep for slaughter and one to two years to raise cattle. Large animals also need fodder and roughage, both of which are in short supply in Afghanistan's dry, southern region. Chickens need feed to mature.

This program, for which Dr. Ramzan is providing technical assistance and mentoring, is expected to revitalize the poultry industry and combat hunger and poverty in Kandahar province.

*A Kandahar resident and his neighbors inspect 30 white leghorn chicks he received as part of a poultry revitalization project.*

*(Photos by Claudia K. Bullard, U.S. Army, 105th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment)*

**State Farm To Be Rebuilt as a Farming Systems Research Center**—Gary Domian, a soil and water conservationist with USDA's NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service), and a team of non-governmental

organization representatives, assessed the possibility of rehabilitating Tarnac State Farm in southern Afghanistan. The 2,372-acre farm was rich in resources before it was destroyed by war. The team concluded that this would be an ideal site for a Farming Systems Research Center where extension efforts and training could take place. The center will handle irrigated and non-irrigated cropping trials and demonstrate soil and water conservation practices, such as how to ameliorate wind erosion. Donors will be sought to pay for a long-term Afghan research extension specialist to set up the center with the help of short-term research assistants. Kandahar University students and agricultural short-course students will get hands-on-training at the center as well. Eventually Kandahar province will take over the center.

**Veterinary Center Under Construction**—A ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the construction of the new Kapisa province veterinary center was held in early February. The governor of Kapisa province, the U.S. commander of the Parwan PRT and Drew Adam, a soil and water conservationist with the NRCS and a member of the Parwan PRT, attended the ceremony.



*Resources Conservation Service)*

Dr. Robert Smith, national program leader for agricultural homeland security in the Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service, worked collaboratively with EU (European Union) aid agencies, USAID (U.S. Agency for International Development) and the Afghan Ministry of Agriculture to complete this center. Dr. Smith served on the Parwan PRT prior to Mr. Adam.

*At left, the Governor of Kapisa thanks the Parwan PRT for the construction of a new veterinary center. (Photo by Drew Adam, USDA's Natural*

Soon the EU aid agencies, USAID and USDA will begin a national animal health initiative at the center. The center will serve as a model for other animal clinics throughout Afghanistan and will provide a critical link between the central government's veterinary activities and those conducted in villages throughout Kapisa province.

**Farm-to-Market Bridge Being Built**—Randy Frescoln, business and cooperative program director with the Rural Business Cooperative Service, proposed that a farm-to-market bridge be built over the Kunduz River to provide farmers with easy access to market centers. These centers are under construction and will contain production areas and warehouses. A private firm agreed to construct the Qasemali Bridge and an additional 3.9 miles of roadway along the Kunduz-to-Kabul highway using \$100,000 in funds from the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program in Afghanistan. Once the bridge and roadway are completed it is expected that farmers will be able to get better prices for their products.

## Food Aid Provides Relief Until Agricultural Productivity Resumes

Food aid is an important component in USDA's efforts to help Afghanistan's people. In 2003, USDA donated \$14.5 million of nonfat dry milk to the Aga Khan Foundation for use in Afghanistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan under a Section 416(b) agreement to fund school feeding, educational and development projects. Also in 2003, our two countries signed a \$5-million agreement under the Food for Progress that will support the planting of fruit and nut trees, higher education and institutional capacity building.

In 2004, USDA signed an agreement for almost \$7 million with another private aid organization, World Vision, to donate wheat, rice, lentils and vegetable oil under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program. This program provides for USDA donations of agricultural commodities to promote education, child development and food security for some of the world's poorest children.

In 2003, USDA signed a similar agreement with World Vision for almost \$9 million to provide take-home food rations to 37,000 children and several hundred teachers in western Afghanistan. The school feeding program's focus was on getting girls into school.

USDA plans to provide Afghanistan with food assistance valued at nearly \$48 million in 2005. Our two countries recently signed a \$15-million agreement under the Food for Progress program. The agreement calls for the Afghan government to sell 23,000 tons of U.S. soybean oil. Proceeds from the sale will support development through higher education, rural extension services and institutional capacity building. The Food for Progress program provides for donations of agricultural commodities to needy countries to encourage economic or agricultural reforms that foster free enterprise.

In 2005, USDA will provide the International Fertilizer Development Corporation and Mercy Corps, Inc., with agricultural commodities valued at \$10 million and \$2.6 million, respectively, under the Food for Progress Program. Proceeds from the sale of these commodities will be used to support agricultural development programs in Afghanistan.

Now in its third year, USDA is supporting a project in northern Afghanistan run by the Aga Khan Foundation. The project will use up to \$10 million in U.S. nonfat dry milk to conduct school-feeding activities. The donations will consist of surplus commodities under the Section 416(b) program.

USDA will also donate \$10 million to World Vision under the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program to continue the school feeding program in western Afghanistan begun in 2003.

This assistance will be in addition to the \$59 million in U.S. food aid already provided in 2003 and 2004.

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