



## Bibi's garden of empowerment

**Women increase their income and improve their family's food security and nutrition through kitchen gardening thanks to the support provided by FAO in Badakhshan province, Afghanistan**

Bibi Aqiq, 58, gets ready to start picking the vegetables in the garden. "I couldn't imagine this produce when I planted it, and in no way having a surplus to sell in the market," says Bibi looking at her crowded garden. She can't hide her satisfaction with the quality yield she has produced.

Bibi heads one of the 4 500 vulnerable families that have received an emergency agriculture package in Badakhshan province. This kit includes wheat seeds and fertilizers, a home gardening package and specific training, all of that thanks to funding provided by Denmark.

"The whole family had been living out of my son's teacher salary for several years. We were constantly in a precarious situation. That salary wasn't enough for us ten," explains the Afghan widow farmer.

### **A garden for women's empowerment**

Bibi lives in Ishkashim district, one of the most remote areas of Badakhshan Province, in Northeastern Afghanistan. Winter is harsh in Ishkashim. The district is usually covered by snow for months. But the

overall climate is warmer than in most neighbouring areas. Over 80 percent of the working age population in Ishkashim district work on agriculture and livestock activities, but surprisingly enough, growing vegetables is not common.

"At first, we did not know much about how to cultivate of vegetables and its benefits," says Bibi, who allocated 0.5 jeribs of land (0.1 hectares) to grow the various vegetables.

Poor and food insecure female farmers like Bibi were provided with eight types of vegetable certified seeds (cabbage, coriander, onion, okra, squash, red radish, tomato and eggplant) alongside home gardening tools. In addition, they have also received specific training regarding vegetable cultivation, pest control and fertilization.

Cultivating vegetables helps female farmers generate an empowering income, while they improve the nutrition of their families and the whole community, and preserve natural resources.

Now, as a producer, Bibi faces different challenges. "We don't have enough storage as to keep our production for a long time," says the farmer while picking some ripe tomatoes. "Fortunately, I am happy



that the water canal, which was often destroyed by heavy rains or flash floods, was finally fixed,” she adds. Ishkashim district neighbours have rehabilitated water canals in the district through FAO’s cash-for-work assistance funded by Denmark, too.

### Wheat, key to food security

Under the same intervention, Bibi has also got high-quality certified wheat seeds and fertilizers to cultivate three jeribs of land (0.6 hectares) with the invaluable support of his son. They will use the seeds for the upcoming spring season, starting in April. Wheat production is a key pillar of Afghanistan’s food security.

Bibi is excited because she has learned that the certified high-quality wheat seeds provided by FAO can increase the wheat production in up to one ton per jerib. This would represent the income that takes her family out of the constant struggle they have withstood over the last few years. That extra ton of wheat production equals, at market prices, to the cost of a basic food basket for a family for five months. Besides, she will produce new seeds for the autumn wheat cultivation season; by that time, Bibi will have already had a second harvest in her garden and, hopefully, forgotten the scarcity of last years.

The Kingdom of Denmark provided funding for FAO to rebuild agricultural livelihoods and strengthen both coping capacities and the overall food and nutrition security of vulnerable smallholder farmers across Afghanistan.

## ‘Magical feed’ and facemasks in times of need and pandemic



Nasruddin received livestock emergency support to increase his resilience against pandemic.

### FAO increases the resilience of Kuchi nomadic communities through COVID-19 sensitization and anticipatory action in remote areas of Afghanistan

Nasruddin’s income had suddenly plummeted since the last spring migration in April. For some strange reason he could not figure out, he was not selling anywhere near as much as he used to in the markets. His declining earnings made it difficult for him to feed and deworm his five goats. How will we endure next winter, he wondered.

By mid-October, the family migrated with a caravan of Kuchi nomadic herders back to his village, in Kandahar province, southern Afghanistan. As usual, they came to spend winter in a warmer place. Nonetheless, the early cold weather seemed to announce a tough wintertime.

“I don’t think my goats will have reached the next spring because they were already tired and vulnerable to any disease due to our winter migration. They would have been affected very badly,” says Nasruddin.

### Leaving no one behind

One day, absorbed in thoughts, his mobile phone rang. In collaboration with the provincial authorities, community and village leaders, FAO had selected his family to receive livestock emergency support to anticipate the pandemic-related shocks, so to increase their resilience to cope with them, as well as to sensitize them about the new coronavirus and how to prevent its spread.

Thanks to the generous funding of Germany and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), FAO worked to minimize the potential impacts of COVID-19 to the agricultural livelihoods of vulnerable people of remote areas in the provinces of Herat, Kabul, Nimroz, Balkh, Faryab, Kandahar and Nangarhar. A total of 3 500 food insecure Kuchi households have been eventually assisted.

### Livestock plus assistance and increased resilience

Nasruddin hung up and ran to tell the news to the family. His growing worry about the near future had suddenly been dissipated. Every household would receive a full livestock support package, which consisted of 100 kg of concentrated animal feed, and veterinary support through the deworming programme.

The animal feed provided is fortified with protein and extra calories to keep Nasruddin’s animals healthy, productive, and strong enough to cope with the upcoming winter. Moreover, the deworming campaign provided preventive medication against the parasites that make the animals susceptible to other deadly diseases.

“The quality of feed from the market is much lower compared to the ‘magical feed’ provided by FAO. My animals quickly got in good shape to weather the whole winter,” says the Kuchi herder.

### COVID-19 sensitization

Kuchis maintain their ancestral lifestyle: they live in remote areas and make the seasonal migration. They raise their animals and sell them and their products to local communities for their subsistence. Despite being essential to Afghanistan’s food security through their contribution in terms of animal products and by-products, the majority of Kuchis like Nasruddin are poor and live a stressful life.

Armed conflict, tribal and ethnic violent disputes, as well as extreme weather shocks, like the severe drought in 2018, have been the main drivers challenging the nomadic tribe’s food security. COVID-19 was going to be another punch in their still fragile food security gut.

Further to the livestock related assistance, Nasruddin’s family received N-95 reusable facemasks along with a set of anti-germ soaps. Assisted families participated in a briefing on COVID-19 preventive measures. They learned how and where to use masks, as well as how to wash their hands effectively in order to prevent the transmission of the virus.

By the time FAO reached out to Kuchi herder nomadic communities, they knew very little about COVID-19. Kuchis migrate to cooler and remote areas during Kandahar’s hot summer; therefore, sensitization campaigns had barely reached to them, and communities had paid little attention to the disease for several economic, social and religious reasons.

“I did not know that by applying these easy steps, we could prevent COVID-19. Had we known this by early spring last year, we would have saved the lives of some of our relatives who have died due to this disease,” says Nasruddin.

The Kuchi family has so far managed to stay away from the new coronavirus and will have soon overcome the harshness of winter. The herd is healthy, and some nannies are expected to give birth in the coming spring. Nasruddin looks forward to greener pastures in 2021.

The Federal Republic of Germany and Central Emergency Response

Fund (CERF), managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), provided funding for FAO to deliver a time-sensitive and season-critical intervention to protect vulnerable Kuchis' livestock and livelihoods; as well as women-headed farming families, landless labourers and marginal farming households' food and nutrition security. The intervention also ensured the safe functioning of agricultural markets in order to prevent – or at least minimize – the transmission of COVID-19.

## Japan pledges new funding to FAO's emergency operations in Afghanistan

### Japan pledges new funding to FAO's emergency operations in Afghanistan

#### Funding to provide time-critical agricultural support to 8 000 food insecure smallholder families

Japan has announced today its decision to disburse USD 122.2 million to support humanitarian and development programmes in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. The new funding is part of Japan's previous commitment to provide financial assistance to Afghanistan by up to USD 180 million per year between 2021 and 2024.

Japan's assistance will be allocated to various humanitarian and development sectors, including food security, so to provide urgent and immediate support to the hardest-hit population by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to the generous funding from Japan (USD 1.8 million) under this allocation, FAO will be able to assist 8 000 vulnerable smallholder households (about 56 000 people), including women-headed households and landless labour, which are directly dependent on farming or herding.

#### Support to improve near-term resilience and food security

"This intervention will mitigate the adverse impacts of COVID-19, enhance their food security and nutrition situation, as well as it will help increase their near-term resilience by providing time-critical and agricultural season-sensitive support," said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

"Japan is pleased to continue the long-standing and fruitful collaboration with FAO in Afghanistan through this new funding. FAO's solid technical expertise and proved capacity to deliver timely make the UN specialized agency one of Japan's preferred partners to improve the lives of Afghan people in need, in particular in this time of distress," said His Excellency, OKADA Takashi, Japan's Ambassador



Emergency and resilience assistance to the most vulnerable farmers in Balkh province.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Bibi's garden of empowerment
- 'Magical feed' and facemasks in times of need and pandemic
- Japan pledges new funding to FAO's emergency operations in Afghanistan
- A solar-powered milk cooling center created a sustainable market for the people of Karukh
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to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

#### 56 000 people to receive different agricultural packages

The activities under this upcoming funding will be implemented in Badghis, Daykundi, Ghor, and Uruzgan provinces. All four provinces are facing severe widespread food insecurity – according to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), they are projected to be in Phase 4 - Emergency/Acute food insecurity.

Through Japan's funding, 4 000 vulnerable families, with access to two to four jeribs of rainfed or irrigated land, will benefit from the agriculture summer cultivation and winter wheat production packages.

Another 4 000 vulnerable households – mainly landless labourers, women-headed and marginal landowners – will benefit from a nutrition-sensitive kitchen gardening vegetable cultivation kit, as well as cash-based interventions (cash-for-work and unconditional cash transfers). Furthermore, 1 100 of the most vulnerable households from these 4 000 vulnerable households will receive further support, either through a backyard poultry production package or through solar driers micro-processors.

## A solar-powered milk cooling center created a sustainable market for the people of Karukh

The establishment of milk collection and cooling centers closer to the farmers' is one of the most important steps to create a market for milk. However, basic infrastructures such as electricity and roads are the must to establish such markets. In general, raw milk, without intermediate cooling, can be transported within an hour to a milk processing center, where milk is immediately cooled or processed. However, from rural villages, transportation of raw milk to a processing center may take several hours during which the milk can be spoiled. This is the major reason why milk-producing farmers living in the rural areas of Afghanistan do not have access to sustainable markets for their raw milk. Milk collection and cooling centers, if established in such rural areas, would largely facilitate cooling of raw milk after collection, and preserving for up to 24 hours before transferring to the processing center. However, most of the rural villages in the country





Solar-powered milk cooling centers constructed in Karukh district of Herat province.

do not have access to electricity supply to run the milk cooling machines.

### Solar power as an alternate source of energy

Solar powered milk cooling centers can provide a sustainable solution to the rural villages that are deprived of electricity, especially during summer time when days are longer with clear sunshine, and milk cooling becomes specifically important.

Hasib Onib Ltd. is a private livestock enterprise established in 2014 with a dairy farm and a milk processing and selling center located in Karukh district in Herat province. The enterprise had been facing difficulties even to manage and cool 500 liters of milk daily due to lack of proper infrastructure, and facing milk losses due to spoilage. Thanks to the USAID-funded Promoting Value Chain West (PVCW) project implemented by FAO, the problem has been largely solved. The project supported the enterprise with the installation of a model solar-powered milk collection and cooling center in Karukh district. This 4 kW solar plant provides sufficient electricity required for the milk cooling machines. Since the solar plant system was procured locally in Herat, regular maintenance support has also been ensured at an affordable cost. “The concept of solar-powered milk cooling center is best suited for a place like Karukh. When the PVC-W team approached us for installation of this model, I did not even think twice while making a decision to install it,” says Habib Ur Rahman Nasr, the owner of Hasib Onib enterprise.

The enterprise now can collect and cool a minimum of 1000 liters of milk daily. The project has also provided small milk processing equipment, such as batch pasteurizer, Chaka making machine, solar dryer for qorot (dried yogurt), and milk cans that has enabled the enterprise to process surplus milk into longer shelf-life products such as yogurt, quroot, and paneer (cheese). Milk hygiene and quality are also preserved providing the enterprise the opportunity and competitive advantage to sell the milk to the processing enterprises in the city. Necessary training on milk collection, and testing for quality and safety has also been provided that has largely helped them enhance their skills and knowledge on milk processing. Meanwhile, new jobs have also been created for the rural people along the whole milk value chain.

### A sustainable market for raw milk producer

Currently, the center is cooling the milk before sending it to the city. Habib Ur Rahman also has a farm having 40 high quality Holstein Friesian herds, including 25 milking cows that produce 500 liter milk per day. The farm is very well-organized and managed with good farming practices. The enterprise now has a dairy shop in Herat city that is selling milk and the milk products coming from Karukh. Since the demand is increasing, the enterprise has also started collecting raw milk from more than 50 neighboring households in Karukh village, and the center aims to support up to 150 households

in future. The project has therefore also enabled the enterprise to develop a sustainable market for raw milk producers creating more job opportunities that would help other rural households generate additional income and improve their livelihoods.

“I always wanted to help improve the livelihoods of the neighboring farmers by regularly buying milk from them. This was not possible in the past since I did not have the electricity to cool milk. Now, I am very happy that these poor farmers have access to a regular market for selling milk at their doorstep and I sincerely thank USAID and FAO for this support”, adds Habib Ur Rahman with smile in his face.

The model milk collection and cooling center has provided a sustainable solution to create market access to raw milk produced by smallholder farmers in Karukh. As the cooling center is also established with all the basic hygienic standards, the center serves as an ideal model to be replicated in other parts of the country.

## Nuristani livestock keepers beat a harsh winter

### FAO helps vulnerable livestock keepers safeguard their livelihood, boost milk production and avoid rural migration in Afghanistan

Landholding in Nuristan province of Afghanistan is for the few. The vast majority of Nuristan’s population rely on livestock production. However, due to climate change and weather extremes, making a living out of it can sometimes feel like finding one’s balance in tightrope walking.

Such was the case for Ziaur-Rahman, a farmer from Nuristan, in late 2019. The spill over effects of the severe drought in 2018 in Afghanistan challenged most livestock owners like him with a shortage of fodder, pasture and overall animal feed resources. Animal feed prices had increased between 50 to 80 percent.

“I was deeply concerned about the survival of my livestock during the harsh winter of Nuristan. At that time, the cost of the fodder needed to safeguard one cattle throughout the season was equivalent to the market price of that one cattle,” says Ziaur-Rahman.

Hence, most livestock keepers started destocking at very low prices or desperately selling all their animals. Incurring in debt was not an option either, since there wasn’t anyone or any institution to take the loan from.

As a consequence, they were losing their livelihood in exchange of short-term liquidity to satisfy their family’s most immediate food needs. Deprived of their livelihood, many livestock keepers were therefore headed with no remedy towards nearby cities like Asad Abad, Jalalabad and Mehterlam, where informal wage labour would be their only means of subsistence.

### Sweden’s funding to assist livestock keepers and herders

Thanks to the generous support from the Government of Sweden, FAO conducted a situational assessment together with its implementing partner ZOA to tackle this humanitarian emergency. Together, they quickly assisted the most vulnerable livestock keepers and herders households with a livestock protection package, consisting of 100 kg of concentrated animal feed, deworming and 3 kg of fodder crop seed.

A total of 3 000 livestock households affected by drought in Parun and Wama districts of Nuristan province received this assistance. Another 25 200 livestock-keeping households (242 845 people) were also supported across the other five hardest-hit provinces by the 2018 drought (Badakshan, Badghis, Daykundi, Kandahar and Urozgan).

“We were on the verge of losing our livelihood, but this assistance, when we were in a very difficult situation, has had a positive impact on livestock productivity,” affirms Ziaur-Rahman. Throughout the



Livestock keepers and herders were assisted with emergency livestock protection packages.

harshness of Afghanistan's winter, FAO dewormed 154 356 large and small ruminants (cattle, goats and sheep) belonging to 24 000 smallholder households in all target provinces.

#### **Boosting milk production: improving food security, increasing resilience**

For many of the livestock owners assisted, the concentrated animal feed was the sweetest surprise; most of them did not know the benefits of this game-changer animal feed.

"In the beginning, we were not very keen to feed our animals with concentrated feed, as we were not aware of the benefits. It was the first time ever that our community would receive livestock assistance, and it was also the first time we would ever feed our animals with concentrated animal feed," says Ziaur-Rahman.

In combination with the rest of the livestock protection package, the concentrated feed contributed to an apparent animal weight gain, as well as it increased milk production in up to 60 percent. "My two cows used to produce between 4 and 5 litres of milk per day until I started feeding them with the concentrated animal feed I received from FAO. Ever since, my cows started producing between 7 and 8 litres of milk per day," says the Afghan livestock keeper as an example. For him, feeding his two cows and four sheep and goats with concentrated animal feed has become a "priority".

As a result of the increased production, the 3 000 vulnerable households assisted in Nuristan can nowadays include enough milk and dairy products in their day-to-day diet. This superior milk production has also generated an extra cash income through the sale of dairy products; this financial push covers their food, health and first needs, like school materials for their children.

#### **Thinking of the future and La Niña upcoming threat**

The assistance provided to Afghan livestock keepers and herders also aimed to increase medium-term resilience. In order to do so, 28 000 vulnerable people have been trained in best practices for sustainable livestock management and fodder crop cultivation.

In turn, local authorities have also realized the potential of concentrated animal feed. "We are looking for an investor to fund a new concentrated animal feed manufacturing plant in Nuristan province," says **Mr Abdul Ghafoor Malikzai, Provincial Governor of Nuristan.**

Ziaur-Rahman wishes to have further assistance in order to improve milk processing conditions in stables across Nuristan province. For him, this improvement would represent another step forward towards increasing both livestock productivity and production.

The Nuristani livestock keepers may have to endure yet another extreme weather this year. As forecast by the World Meteorological Organization, the complex weather pattern La Niña threatens

Afghanistan with medium to strong intensity drought conditions. Its influence is already showing in the form of fewer precipitations (both rain and snowfall), warmer temperatures and poor vegetative conditions for wheat crop and rangelands, among others. According to the latest FAO analysis, pasture growth, livestock health, wheat cultivation, and groundwater are most likely going to be severely affected. Livestock keepers like Ziaur-Rahman are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance in the form of livestock protection to avoid distress sale and to build resilience against the expected deterioration of agricultural livelihoods over the current wintertime season.

The Kingdom of Sweden provided generous funding for FAO to improve the food security and livelihoods of drought-affected farmers and pastoralists through enhanced agricultural and livestock production in Badakshan, Badghis, Daykundi, Kandahar, Nuristan and Urozgan provinces of Afghanistan.

## Unveiling the secret to productive wheat cultivation

### **Afghan farmers attend an eye-opening technical training on wheat cultivation as part of FAO's emergency wheat cultivation assistance package, comprising certified seed, fertilizer, technical training, and COVID-19 sensitization.**

"If the foundations of a house are not solidly built, can the house be safe and steady?" asked Abdul Qodus Shams, extension worker, to the farmers attending the training on land preparation, wheat cultivation, fertilizer application, and irrigation techniques in a village of Noorgal district, Kunar province, Afghanistan.

Abdul's training session was specifically discussing the most effective way of applying fertilizer for wheat. He intended to disprove with facts the traditional but ineffective methods, as most farmers used to apply urea only once during the crop growing season. "I looked after my wheat crops very carefully, but they were very often too weak," says Pak Rahman, one of the 37 200 farmers who have attended this same training organized by FAO in 16 provinces across Afghanistan.

#### **The unveiled secret: how much and when you should use urea**

Pak Rahman did not know how to correctly apply urea in order to build the solid 'foundations' for wheat crops to grow properly. During the technical training, he learnt how much and at what cropping stage to use these fertilizers. "This is the big secret that has been unveiled to me thanks to this training. I immediately put this advice into practice for this cropping season and my crops are growing healthier, greener, and stronger," admits the Afghan farmer.

When urea is correctly applied throughout the cropping cycle,



Pak Rahman explains about what he has learnt from the training.



including seed sowing, tillering, and heading stages, it contributes to strengthening wheat crops so to better withstand pests and crop diseases, as well as heavy rains or high winds – another important lesson learnt for Pak Rahman, who had often struggled with these issues. He believes that “anyone who actively participated in the technical training will see big positive changes in their wheat production”.

“The villagers are satisfied because they have seen tremendous ‘greenery’ and remarkable differences in their wheat cultivation this season,” says Abdul.

The training was conducted by Future Generations Afghanistan (FGA), FAO’s implementing partner, as part of a more comprehensive and time-critical assistance project. FAO assisted marginal and food insecure farming households through emergency agricultural inputs. Thanks to the funding provided by the Underfunded Emergencies window of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), managed by OCHA, more than 250 000 vulnerable farming families in 46 districts across 16 provinces of Afghanistan have been assisted.

#### **Wheat cultivation package: an opportunity in times of distress**

Coupled with other factors, such as heightened insecurity or the lingering effects of the 2018 severe drought, COVID-19 related restrictions to movement spiked commodity prices, meaning that vulnerable farming families could not access improved (certified) wheat seeds. As reported by the 2020 Seasonal Food Security Assessment, over 90 percent of farmers cannot buy certified seeds. They are either too expensive or simply not locally available.

“I had no intention of cultivating wheat for the next season because I knew I couldn’t afford the costs of buying certified seeds from the market,” says Rahimullah, a farmer from Paktika province.

Rahimullah’s family has endured hardship and hasn’t been able to yield anything from their agricultural land. One cow was their only means of livelihood. As many other vulnerable farming families, they were lacking the knowledge as well as the necessary amount of quality seeds and fertilizers to get started.

Like Rahimullah or Pak Rahman, all of the participants received a wheat cultivation package, which consists of 50 kg of certified wheat seeds, 50 kg of diammonium phosphate fertilizer, and 50 kg of urea fertilizer. “This package has given me the possibility to grow wheat. I am more than happy for this time-critical emergency assistance,” says Rahimullah.

This support has reached the most vulnerable farmers in remote rural areas in Laghman province. FAO estimates that this emergency assistance will indirectly benefit over 750 000 people, thus mitigating some of the COVID-19 impacts and the ongoing food crisis.

Building short-term resilience and preventing the spread of COVID-19

“The best of this support is that I will become self-sufficient thanks to the new fruitful wheat yield,” says Raess Khan, 45, a farmer from Nangarhar province. “I understand the characteristics of good wheat seed, as well as the best time to plant, irrigate and apply fertilizers. I am very lucky to have cultivated an improved wheat seed variety,” he adds.

The estimated wheat production is expected to cover each family’s staple food consumption for seven months. Wheat straw used as forage for livestock will also contribute to safeguarding their food and nutrition security.

As part of the assistance provided, all participants also received a COVID-19 awareness raising session to reduce the risks of transmission of the virus, including safety measures to adopt when at the farm or at the market. Most families were not aware of the health risks of the pandemic and how to mitigate them.

The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF), managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), through its Underfunded Emergencies window, provided the

funding for FAO to provide this time-critical assistance to marginal and food insecure farming households in Afghanistan. The main aim of the intervention was to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing food crisis through the provision of emergency agricultural inputs.

## Farmers find the path to sustainable and profitable dairy farming in Logar province



Haji Rahmatullah learnt silage production from a training organized by FAO.

#### **Dairy farmers improve their milk production and generate thereby a sustainable income thanks to the effective adoption of new technologies facilitated by FAO**

Livestock is not only a valuable asset but a critical means of livelihood for rural smallholder farmers in Afghanistan. Despite the importance of livestock production in Afghanistan, low-quality livestock production has remained a great challenge for Afghan farmers. Due to the limited access to quality fodder, wheat straw and low-quality fodder have traditionally been livestock’s staple diet (especially during the winter season, since green fodder is only seasonal in most places); hence hampering livestock productivity. Besides, most farmers have never considered silage as a strategic priority intervention to preserve animal feed.

Thanks to an FAO project aimed to develop the dairy industry, and funded by the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), the most vulnerable dairy farmers in Logar province have been provided with training to improve their livestock production, improve dairy farmers’ food and nutrition security and enhance the production capacity of the dairy sector.

#### **The success story of Haji Rahmatullah**

“Now, I have sustainable sources of income through the sale of milk and the production of silage. I can support my family and cover the expenses of my children’s education,” says Haji Rahmatullah with pride on his face.

Haji Rahmatullah is a 58-year-old dairy farmer who lives with 16 family members in Mohammad Agha district, Logar province. He is an active member of the dairy cooperative that was established by this dairy industry development project in his village. Before Rahmatullah joined the cooperative, he had a miserable life; he was not able to feed his family, as he had no sustainable source of income. He had a cow, but the milk produced was not enough to feed the family. Moreover, feeding his cow with quality fodder was a huge challenge for Haji Rahmatullah, particularly during the winter season.

Fortunately, Rahmatullah’s life changed since he joined the dairy cooperative in 2014. In addition to the training that he received on

silage making and animal feeding, he also attended various training on animal health, artificial insemination, and veterinary skills. This training helped him grow his cattle population. He started to practice hygienic milking and the milk production increased by 400 percent.

With the support of this dairy industry development project, Haji Rahmatullah has managed to grow his cattle up to four cows and four crossbred calves. He milks 47 litres per day, out of which four liters are consumed at home, and the remaining 43 litres are sold to the milk collection center at 27 AFN (USD 0.34) per liter. The sale of milk has become a sustainable source of income for Haji Rahmatullah. His monthly milk sales revenue is around USD 440.

#### Transferring knowledge to benefit other farmers

Haji Rahmatullah shared the knowledge and practical skills that he has gained on silage making with the other 25 farmers in the village. This year, the farmers trained by him have produced more than 40 000 kg of silage to feed their cows and sell in the market. Thanks to the project, Haji Rahmatullah and other farmers in his village have sustainable access to livestock feed and are able to produce higher milk yields.

This IFAD-funded and FAO implemented project also supports the farmers to establish milk collection centers, dairy cooperatives, and dairy unions at the village, provincial and national level to market their products. The project also facilitates veterinary field units to provide services to dairy farmers at a reasonable cost.

## National farmer's day: Acknowledging the important role of farmers in agriculture growth in Afghanistan

National Farmer's Day, or Melay-e- Dehqan, is celebrated on the second day of the solar year across Afghanistan to honour Afghan farmers as food heroes. It's one of the most important events that is widely celebrated by the Government, farmers, and people of Afghanistan through the organization of agriculture exhibitions, traditional live shows, and other public events.

On the occasion, the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) organized an agriculture product exhibition in Badambagh farm in Kabul. The aim was to celebrate Afghanistan's rich agriculture heritage, appreciate the role of Afghan farmers, boost the sale of local products, promote the visibility of small agri-businesses, and increase fundraising opportunities for the agriculture sector.

A four-day exhibition was started on 22 March. Participants ranging from organizations working in the agriculture sector to international resource partners in development cooperation, entrepreneurs, national and international traders, farmers, and the public attended the fair.

#### Agriculture and the role of Afghan farmers

Agriculture is the backbone of the Afghan economy. It plays an important role in the livelihoods of over 75 percent of the Afghan population and it is the only means of subsistence for

nearly 90 percent of the poor living in the rural areas.

"Farmers are essential players in shaping the economy of the country. Without their support and dedication, we would not have a meal on our plates every time and anytime. Therefore, it is vital to extend support to farmers, so to strengthening the agriculture sector, improving the livelihoods of the majority of the population, and ensuring food and nutrition security", said Rajendra Aryal, FAO Representative in Afghanistan.

National farmers' day is a call to highlight the critical need for the Government, international agencies, science partners, food industries, and national and international markets to support farmers and local communities in the challenges they face, such as climate change, conflict, food losses, and lack of updated agriculture technology.

Wheat production is a good example of an agricultural area where farmers need support. In Afghanistan wheat is a major staple crop with an annual requirement of 6.6 million metric tons. However, due to various challenges and issues, the wheat deficiency for 2021 is predicted to be between 1.4 to 2.3 million metric tonnes.

#### FAO stands by Afghan farmers for improved agriculture and food security

FAO has always supported the efforts that lead to food and nutrition security and agriculture growth in Afghanistan. FAO's support to the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan farmers ranges from policy development, improved food security, increased livestock production, water, land, and forest management, resilience building, humanitarian assistance, and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Through some of FAO's intervention in 2020, 1 333 430 vulnerable smallholder farmers were assisted with emergency assistance; 42 000 cattle were vaccinated, treated, and dewormed, 72 879 households were benefitted by the construction of 15 irrigation schemes; 9 000 fuel-efficient cookstoves were distributed to rural women to conserve local forests; and 9 500 women were trained on skill development, income diversification, and food processing.



FAO's stall in the agriculture fair in Kabul.

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